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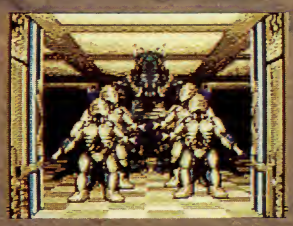

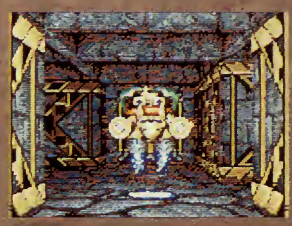

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M I N D S C A P E

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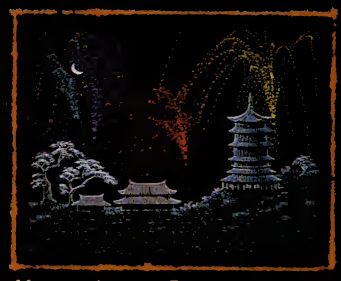
ISHIDO

The Way of Stones

I B M P C



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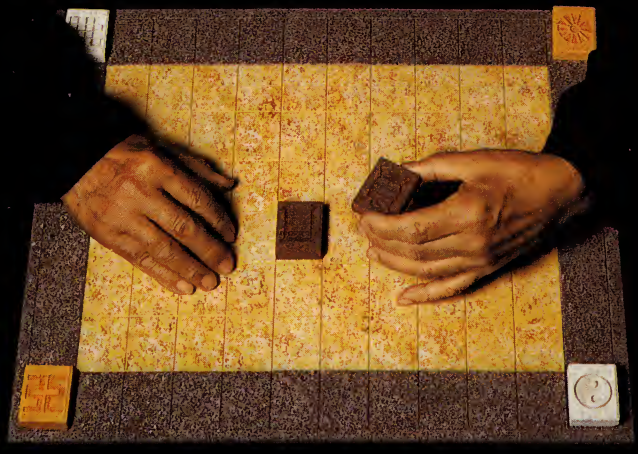

I B M P C

M A C I I

The Chinese called it *Shih Tao*, the ancient Celts called it *Runa futhark*, the Mayan Indians called it *Kami-a-hota*, and the Japanese called it *Ishido*. Yet, regardless of origin, when translated the names all mean one thing, *The Way of Stones*. From the first move, this ancient game and beautiful puzzle recalls the depth of chess and the simplicity of Go. Ishido will call upon your deepest powers of strategy and concentration as you match 72 stones on a board of 96 squares. As you merge with the game's many possibilities, you will have a chance to discover the heart of Ishido, and why, to some, *The Way of Stones* is more than just a game.

Designed by Michael Feinberg

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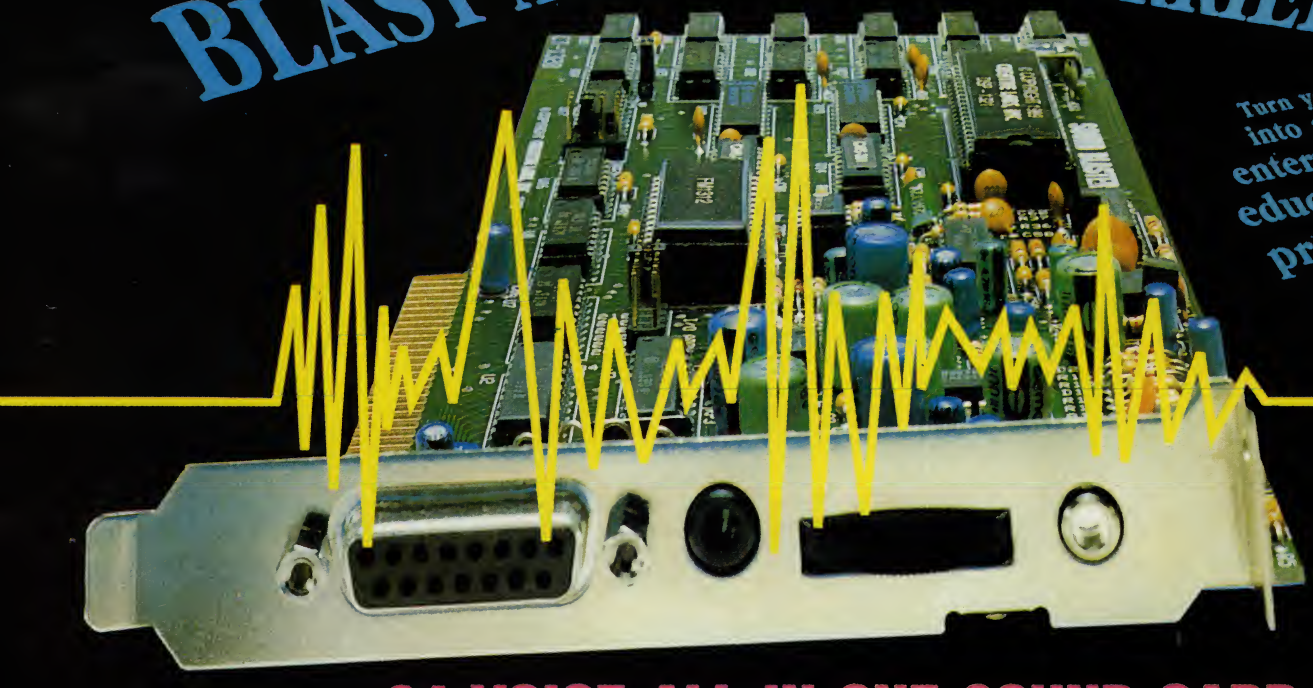

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STRATEGY PLUS

Number 3 December 1990

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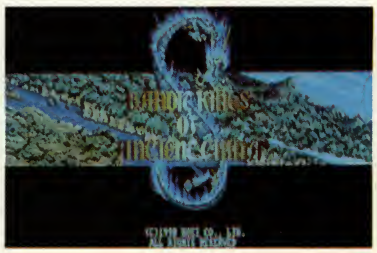

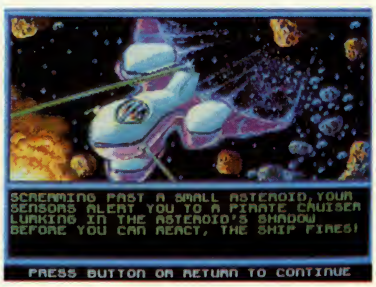
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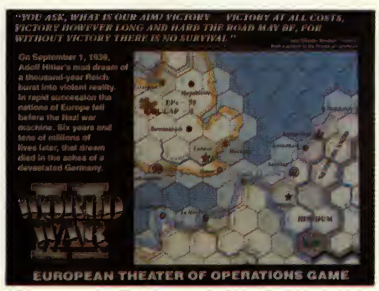

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Hall of Infamy

So just who are they, these *Strategy Plus* so-called writers? What do they eat? Where do they go at night? And do they have proper jobs? These are the questions which the entire nation is asking, the answers to which, of course, we are only too happy to provide.

Theo Clarke: Also known as the 'Voice of Reason' Theo is Editor of a fanzine known as *The Small Furry Creatures Press,* and no, we don't understand it either. Especially as Theo is a large furry creature. Theo has too many hobbies to list here, but we know he spends a lot of time studying things which never happened, long, long, ago. An adventurer at heart, Theo's favourite game is: **Conquests of Camelot.**

John Scott: Formerly the Reverend John Scott, he has now given up the cloth in favour of painting saucy pictures. Currently studying art in Northern Ireland, John enjoys wargames(!) and adventures. Favourite game:**Dungeon Master**.

Maurice Thomas: Currently employed in the BBC library, preserving the golden utterances of Wogan for posterity. Maurice combines his job at the Beeb with trying to work out how to use his Amiga. Something of a surrealist, Maurice was (is?) editor of a zine called *White Rabbit*. Favourite surrealist: Barbara Cartland.

George Campbell: George lives in Caithness – site of the infamous reactor. Considers himself an expert on any game involving nuclear power and/or radiation. Favourite game: **Reach For The Stars**.

Paul Rigby: Describes himself as an 'aviation journalist' on the basis of one ride on the aero flipper at Blackpool Pleasure Beach. Favourite game: **Dungeon Master**

Mike Woodhouse: 'Charlton Athletic' is not something you would normally associate with strategy. And yet Mike manages to be an expert on both. Spends the rest of his time (when he's not watching Charlton) exploring space on his ST. Rumoured to be working on an ST upgrade of **Rails West**. Favourite game: **Railroad Tycoon**.

Dave Morris: Expert on Thai beer and imaginary worlds (especially in combination). Author of several fantasy books (including the *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* books), Dave is a role-player from way back. Favourite game: **Ancient Art of War**.

Jamie Thomson: Former Games Workshop person, Jamie is an expert on anything beginning with **AD&D**. The problem with Jamie is getting him off the games long enough to write about them. Favourite game: 'The next one'.

Frank Dunn: Working for an (ex) Fleet St newspaper has caused Frank to become very keen on issuing writs claiming large sums of money. Actually, he's an absolutely smashing bloke who always gets his copy in on time. Never heard a bad word said about him (is that okay, Frank?). Favourite game: **Harpoon**.

Jonathan Turner: Claims to be an 'actor' on the basis of a summer season on Margate Pier (sunbathing). Currently 'resting' in the role of Reviews Editor. Favourite game: **The Hitchikers Guide to the Galaxy**.

Paul Mason: So-called Production Editor and writer of a series of fantasy books for Puffin. Paul is an expert on indie bands and Japanese beer: indeed, he is currently studying Japanese at the moment, though cynics suggest that this is only so that he can read the labels on the cans. Favourite game: **Nobunaga's Ambition**.

Brian Walker: The world's most pretentious Editor's only claim to literary fame is eating *escargot* at Henry Miller's favourite cafe – the *Deux Maggots* in Paris. Rumoured to be considering an alternative career as a PR consultant. Favourite game: **Railroad Tycoon**.

In deference to our more sensitive readers we have not included pen pictures of the team. Whatever their failings though, (and they are many), we are sure that they would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas. SP

STRATEGY PLUS
Lamerton House, 27 High Street,
Ealing, London W5 5DF
Tel: 081-567 7740 Fax: 081-579 6485
Compuserve: 100016,2503

Editor
Brian Walker

Design & Production
Paul Mason

Reviews Editor
Jonathan Turner

Contributors
GEORGE CAMPBELL, THEO CLARKE, SIMON CORVINUS, DON GREENWOOD, COLIN HARVEY, JOSEPH S McMASTER, IAN MARSH, TREVOR MENDHAM, DAVE MORRIS, PAUL RIGBY, JOHN SCOTT, GORDON SWEENEY

Advertising Agency
Media Specifics
3rd Floor, 242 Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London SW1V 1AU
Tel: 071-828 7141 Fax: 071-828 6685

Distributors:
UK
Diamond-Europress
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Hastings, East Sussex TN35 4NR
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Off Waterloo Ave, Chelmsley Wood,
Birmingham B37 6QD
Tel: 021-788 3112

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Woodstock, Ontario N4S 5X3
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ISHIDO

The Way Of The Stones

by Trevor Mendham

MAYBE I'm just getting old and cynical, but when an abstract game comes with a 30-page booklet attempting to justify its existence in pseudo-philosophical terms, I get a little suspicious. This feeling is reinforced when almost half of the manual is dedicated not to playing the game but to editing and personalising the graphics! Even worse is finding that at certain times during the game you can receive a 'Reading from the Oracle', a collection of auguries based on the I Ching. Such things may add background and atmosphere to adventures and simulations, but if an abstract game is any good it should not need such trappings.

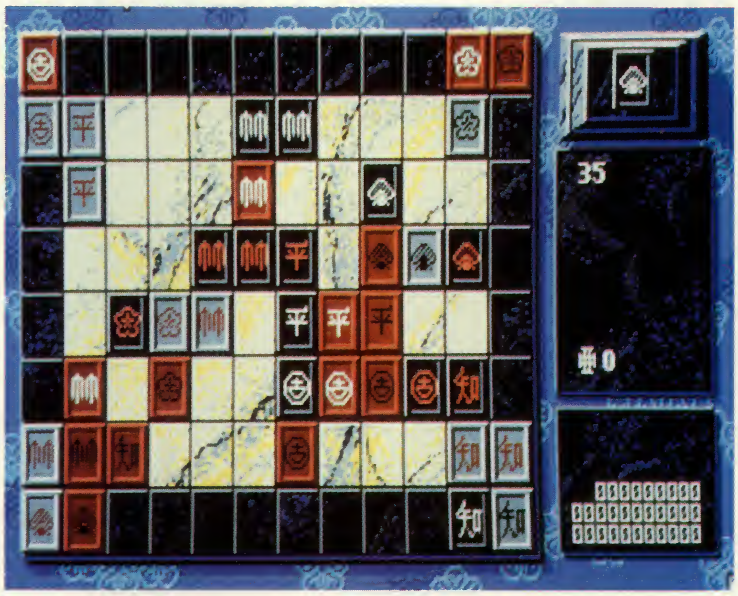
Stoned Again

Ishido is subtitled *The Way of the Stones* which is honest and revealing. **Ishido** is not really a game, but a solitaire puzzle. It **can** be played in competitive mode, but this is unsatisfying and appears almost an afterthought.

Ishido is played on a board of 8 by 12 squares. The pieces (stones) each have one of six colours (or background shades) and one of six patterns. There are two of each stone, giving 72 in all.

At the beginning of the game, six stones representing each colour and pattern are placed by the computer, one in each corner and two in the centre of the board. Thereafter one stone is drawn from the 'Pouch' each turn and must be placed on the board so that it is adjacent to at least one existing stone. The new stone must match the old either by colour or by pattern. When a stone is placed alongside more than one other, all sides must match. These matches must be 'balanced'. So, if you place a stone alongside two others, one must match by colour, the other by shape. In a 3-way match, two matches must be of one type, the third of the other. 4-way matches are, of course, the most difficult, requiring two matches by colour and two by shape. Building up to these 4-ways is the key to the game.

There are two forms of scoring available. Under *Ancient* rules, you win the game simply by getting all the pieces on the board. The more interesting *Modern* system gives points for matches. To gain a good score, it is essential to make as many 4-way matches as possible, while a large bonus is also gained for playing all your stones. A 4-way is also the method for obtaining the Oracle readings, but the less said about this the better!



Having read the manual, the first thing to do is to watch the computer playing. This will convince you that the game is trivial. After all, there're only 72 pieces to place on a 96 square board. The computer usually places most of its stones, making numerous 4-ways in the process, and a little observation reveals the strategy it is using.

You'll probably want to watch the computer a number of times, as the graphics are excellent. There are different default board and stone designs for the different modes. All work well, and VGA is superb. The game comes with a number of different designs for the stonesets to choose from, or you can create your own.

Once you finish admiring the visuals and decide to play a game yourself, you quickly realise that it isn't as simple as it seems. While the computer strategy is fairly straightforward to analyse, to put it into practice requires an excellent memory and an ability to concentrate on many parts of the board at once. **Ishido** is undoubtedly not an easy game.

Unfortunately it isn't a very interesting one either. Options are limited, and there is only really one viable strategy. Luck plays a significant part, namely in the order of the stones, although it is possible to cheat and examine the Pouch. Doing this allows for a much greater degree of planning, but prevents you being placed on the All-Time High scoreboard.

Despite my initial comments, I really wanted to like **Ishido**. It is clearly a labour of love and a lot of work has gone into all aspects of design and production. However, I would have preferred more solid game play to accompany the pretty pictures. SP

WE LIKE...

Railroad Tycoon
Microprose (PC)

Acquire
Avalon Hill
(Beta test version)

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Virgin (All)

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Internecine
(Pre-production version)

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Empire Simulations (All)

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Michael J Feinberg

Published by
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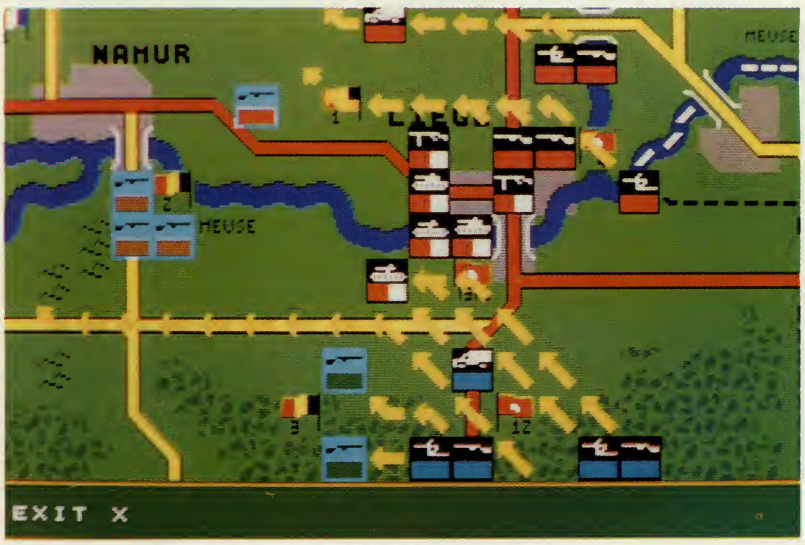
CGA, EGA, VGA, MVGA

BLITZKRIEG – MAY 1940

History In The Making

by George Campbell



BLITZKRIEG – May 1940 is an army-level simulation of the lightning war in western Europe during the Second World War. The player is placed in command of a formidable German invasion force, poised to drive deep into Allied territory. More than 70 Divisions are represented, including 10 Panzer Divisions. The May 1940 option Allied units are pitted against this force in an attempt to fragment the attack.

Blitzkrieg and May 1940 are two sides of the same coin, but it is much easier to direct the Germans than the Allies. May 1940 offers five different set-up positions for the German formations. Play is further described by three levels of difficulty. Engaging the German war machine on the third level is not recommended as the Allied formations crumble with disturbing ease.

Object Of The Attack

Armies, consisting of up to six units, are issued orders relating to avenues of attack and lines of defence. Army commanders have three options: attack, defence, or discretion. They will attempt to follow orders as best they can, depending on combat losses, supply, and how stiff the resistance is. Defending armies automatically receive a combat bonus if subject to attack.

There are six unit types, each with a movement rate and inherent combat bonus. They are: armour, mechanised artillery, mechanised infantry, motorised infantry, artillery, and infantry. It is worth bearing in mind the varying movement rates when setting army objectives, otherwise individual units may forge and be destroyed. There are nine different types of terrain, each requiring the expenditure of movement points and offering a combat adjustment.

Reinforcements can be assigned to armies from the strategic reserve pool, but it may take up to six turns for them to arrive at the front. Armies likely to become involved in heavy fighting can be provided with a tactical reserve, on hand to replace losses immediately. Under strength units are brought back to fighting efficiency by returning to the reserve, where they are amalgamated with others of the same type.

Crude Counters

Army units are not particularly impressive on screen, resembling fairly crude counters. Each unit is distinguished by colour and a symbol to represent unit type. Army HQs are shown as the appropriate national flag, located centrally in relation to subordinate units, and may not be attacked.

The tactical map is used most often, but the strategic map can easily be called up to give a better overview. To assist in planning attacks it is possible to obtain information on enemy units via intelligence reports. These reports vary in accuracy and content according to unit proximity. GHQ may offer advice relating to battle plans and replacements.

Visually, combat is unspectacular, being a tit-for-tat affair, with casualties flashing up as a percentage of fighting capability. A number of factors are taken into account: the supply state of each combatant, the terrain in which the combat occurs, current command orders, the types of units involved, and their morale. The location of primary and secondary supply routes is of particular importance. Hard hit units will disband, distributing their remaining troop strength among related army units.

Diverted Aircraft

There are no air units in **Blitzkrieg**, so German air superiority must have been taken for granted. This is good news for the Allied player, but an unfortunate omission since the direction of 1500 aircraft would have been an engrossing diversion. Similarly, do not expect to be able to sit safely behind the Maginot Line, as it only provides limited support for troops assigned to the forts.

On the whole, movement and combat are perhaps too slow, as it is relatively easy to absorb pertinent information. Also, combat units are abstracted, when a more detailed approach would have added flavour. Designers must surely set their standards by **Second Front** where strategic games are concerned. **Blitzkrieg – May 1940** offers nothing new to the player. Indeed, for the price a good deal more satisfaction would be obtained by opting for a board game covering the same subject. SP

Designed by
Ken Wright

Published by
Impressions

Price £24.99

Available for the
Amiga and ST
Reviewed on the
Amiga

BANDIT KINGS OF ANCIENT CHINA

On The Water Margin

by Paul Mason

BANDIT KINGS is based on a Chinese legend of the Song dynasty, concerning the bandits of Liang Shan Po, and their battle against the ruthless Minister of War Gao Qiu. They have a habit of picking fights with each other at any excuse, but join together eventually and have some pretty large pitched battles against various enemies. This is the aspect of the legend which the game stresses.

Included are four different scenarios representing different starting points from the book, which allow players to play different heroes, with the choice depending on the scenario. The manual is extensive and clearly presented, leading you through the early stages of your first game.

Detailed Heroes

Bandit Kings is based around the basic unit of a province. You control one character, who must recruit other heroes and soldiers, and conquer as many provinces as you can. Play proceeds in the standard fashion with your hero settling in a province and developing its resources. Slowly you start to recruit other heroes, and here the game's strength becomes apparent. There are 255 non player characters in this game (including all 108 heroes of Liang Shan Po); each has a distinctive personality, and many have distinguishing speech patterns. Standard fare for adventure games maybe, but a positive pleasure in a strategy game as man management becomes just as crucial as battlefield ability.

Do Not Despise The Snake

Once you have built up your home province to a reasonable level of productivity and security, you can start expanding into empty provinces, and going to war. Battles take place on a full screen map, and each of the 49 provinces has its own hex map. Combat uses a short menu of options which is easy to get used to, if a little inflexible. Unfortunately, while the combat algorithm is fairly smart, it has some strange flaws. I won one battle with a single hero (who'd lost all his soldiers) who simply ran around a mountain a few times, chased by vastly superior opponents who eventually gave up the fight and left me in the province! Great from a story point of view, but not so hot strategically.

When you capture a new province one of your generals is put in charge of it. Ordinarily he will go about giving orders himself, and you won't get much say in his affairs beyond dictating general strategy. This is a good way of cutting down on your decision making, but it can be a problem if your general is too gung ho and has a habit of flinging his forces against the next fief. If you desperately need fine control, then you can swear brotherhood with one of your heroes whose loyalty isn't in question. A sworn brother enables you to give orders in fiefs other than your home one, and is also not prey to the drops in loyalty which occasionally cause your followers to desert. Since there is a limit to the number of sworn brothers you can have, you never have too many sets of orders to give each turn.

If you capture a lot of provinces, win a lot of battles, and generally do everything right, the Emperor Hui Zhong will bestow on you an edict entitling you to attack Gao Qiu personally. If you beat him, you win. You'd better do it pretty rapidly, though, because in 1127 the Chin nomads sweep down from the northern borders and overthrow the Northern Sung dynasty. Since the game starts somewhere between 1101 and 1105 (depending on the particular scenario) you'll appreciate you don't have *that* much time.

Pretty But Tough

On the plus side, the graphics are effective, with little animations appearing in a stage in the left hand corner of the screen. EGA colour is well deployed, and in CGA mode the designers have opted (wisely, I feel) for black and white to preserve the resolution, rather than have a yucky chunky look.

For me, however, the main problem with this game is its difficulty. Getting the Imperial Edict and defeating Gao Qiu is a real struggle, and while this may make for a challenging game worth playing repeatedly, it rather messes it up as a multi-player game: how much competition between players can there be when attacking your neighbour virtually guarantees that you'll weaken yourself beyond hope of redemption? Apart from this, **Bandit Kings** is a winner. SP

Designed by
Kou Shibusawa

Published by
Koei/Infogrames

Price £24.99

Available for all formats
Reviewed on the PC

CGA, EGA

DEEPER INTO THE BREACH

Strategy in Impressions' Breach 2, by Simon Corvinus

THE FIRST version of **Breach** (1987) was remarkably addictive; it proved to be one of those odd games which manage to achieve minor cult status despite some fairly serious design flaws. The otherwise mystifying title is explained by the fact that **Breach** was originally developed from a spaceship-boarding combat routine in Omnitrend's **Universe II** (1986) – itself memorable for being the only space trading game so far designed to have no arcade elements whatsoever. It resurfaced briefly as **Paladin**, a blatantly cynical clone which simply changed the original background from science fiction to sword & sorcery and which vanished into well-deserved obscurity.

Breach 2 could more accurately be described as an update than a sequel, since what it does is correct some of the first version's interface problems without actually bringing much improvement to the basic design: version 2.0, in fact. While it is a much better package in this form, and still extremely absorbing, there is no doubt that it would have benefited from a radical rethink. The principal limitation lies in the computer opponent's movement and attack algorithms; despite their relative lack of sophistication, an understanding of these will go a long way towards ensuring the survival of a player's squad leader.

To begin with, each scenario comes with a pre-defined number of opponents; there are no 'monster generating' routines. All opponents are in place when a scenario is loaded. After the first round, they may (depending on the difficulty level) move about, including opening doors and using lift shafts; they do so on all five levels, and they do so at random. The only exception involves opponents who have 'seen' a player controlled character, in which case they will normally move within range and attack (they may, however, also try a flanking attack).

Feeding The Troops

Computer opponents can 'see' across six grid squares, in contrast to player characters whose unimpeded sightline is limited to four squares; in other words, an opponent will see you two squares before you can, even assuming random movement does not bring him closer to your final position. This fact suggests that the safest tactic for a player is to keep enough movement points in reserve for his squad's point men to retreat by between two and four squares from the point of furthest penetration – scouts, of course, can use their wide view ability to check for enemies ahead or on the flanks. Needless to say, this is not always feasible in practice, particularly when moving inside a building or ship.

The problem is that these algorithms make for extremely uninspired opponents whose only real talent is for defence; there is no way for a scenario to convincingly simulate a continuous attack or wave of attacks, since opponents mill about or stand within a narrow radius of where they were first placed until reached by the player's forces. So what about those attacks, seemingly out of the blue, which Mike Woodhouse warned against in his review in issue 1? Well, there is a way to keep feeding enemy troops into a particular location, and basically it's a cheat which depends on the strange fact that a lift shaft can emerge onto an otherwise plain surface, without any clue as to its presence.

What the scenario designer does is build one or more rooms on the level beneath the target, install a one-way lift shaft and fill it with troops. Sooner or later, these will find their way into the lift and pop up where least expected; what's more, if a friendly marine happens to be standing on the hot square, he gets smashed just as though that square contained a shaft. Arrival of the opponents can be delayed or staggered by placing some of them behind doors or force fields.

This is not really good enough. If **Breach 2** is indeed to be the first in a series of interlocking games, a lot of serious tweaking remains to be done. I suspect that some of the compromises may be ascribed to the inclusion of a scenario builder: a nice idea in principle, but at the end of the day, how many people are really going to knock up a complete scenario and then sit down to play through it?

Incidentally, the extra campaign disk mentioned, Moon Outpost by Haywood Nichols, can easily be ordered directly from Omnitrend in the States; just give a credit card number, and if you specify air mail delivery, the whole process can take less than a fortnight and is well worth the effort. For the really dedicated, Modern Day Publishing Inc (3223 Silver Pond Court, Charlotte, NC 28210) have produced a huge multi-disk campaign for $60, but I haven't checked this out yet. SP

Breach 2 is published by Impressions, price £24.99. It is available for all formats.

A review of the game appeared in *SP* #1.

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SO REAL YOU CAN SMELL THE SMOKE

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"ROMEO 25 - THIS IS MIKE 77 - SPOT REPORT - 5 T72 TANKS MOVING WEST - GRID 190852 - CONTINUING OVER"

Capt. Sean Bannon snapped his head to the left. There was only one place where the Russians could be, and that was on the hill 2200 metres away. All the training, planning and preparations were over. Team Yankee was about to learn if the team's seventy nine men and twenty five million dollars worth of equipment could do what they were supposed to do.

Team Yankee is designed to test your leadership and tactical skills to the quick. You can display in either **"quadrant mode"** where all four platoons may be controlled at once.

or

Full-screen Mode where the display homes in on just one platoon.

You have the flexibility to display either an overhead map view of the surrounding area, a simulated 3-d view of the battlefield, or a status screen showing the performance of all vehicles in a platoon. Irrespective of which screen mode you choose during battle, there is a constant column of information to the right of the screen.

To the right of the compasses are five icons which represent the various types of **weaponry** available to the unit.

MACHINE GUN - which is always available to the player and has an 'infinite' number of rounds.

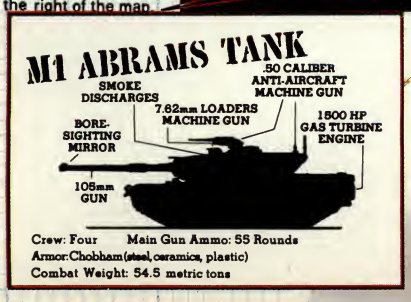
SMOKE - a smoke grenade which allows enemy vision to be obscured.

HEAT - a high explosive anti-tank round

SABOT - an armor-piercing tungsten shell

TOW - a high-range anti-tank missile

The major capability on the quadrant map screen is to alter the movement and formation of any platoon. The whole of the map may be viewed at once, or you may zoom into any portion of the battlefield using the icons to the right of the map.



Team Yankee is the definitive action simulation of modern tank warfare. Watch scenarios unfold on 3D battlefields with high definition graphics and keep track of the four tank platoons you control using the unique 4 quadrant display. Defend Hill 214 from Yuri Potecknov's crack tank platoons, attack Objective Link through sniper fire from forests, protect the Langen Gap from an entire Soviet tank battalion at night!

Five major scenarios based on the battles featured in the New York Times No. 1 best seller Team Yankee.

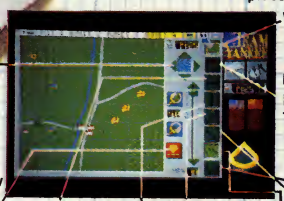
Engine smoke This will prove very useful in confusing your enemy if you find yourself in a tight corner.

Rotation icon and compass display.

Infra red (or thermal) **imaging** This feature is very useful for identifying vehicles camouflaged on the edge of forests. Contary to popular belief the thermal image is green and not red.

Zoom. When this icon is accessed the central portion of the screen is magnified by a factor of 10.

Laser range finder. The range finder will lock on to a reflective target if the firing cursor is placed directly over the object.



Wide formation icon. This increases the spacing between vehicles in your platoon to 100 metres.

Narrow formation icon. This reduces the inter-vehicle spacing in your platoon to 50 metres.

Vee. a vee formation.

Echelon left - places your vehicles on a right to left diagonal relative to your direction.

Wedge - places your vehicles in a wedge formation.

Scroll icon: The four arrows underneath the ETA display allow you to scroll your map in any of the four directions.

Dead Stop icon. This red icon, causes your platoon to come to a dead halt when clicked.

In line - places your vehicles in a line abreast relative to your direction.

Column - places your vehicles in a line ahead relative to your direction.

Echelon right - places your vehicles on a left to right diagonal relative to your direction.

SIMULATION

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BATTLE CHESS II

Metamorphosis For Two

by Brian Walker

AS SOMEONE who considers a game of chess about as exciting as a Party Political Broadcast, perhaps I was not the ideal candidate to review this game. Of course the whole point about chess is that it is meant to be, unlike the messages from our minders, a distinctly *intellectual* experience, albeit of the abstract variety. It therefore says something about this strange deviation that it persuaded me to finally to learn the game, if only for the sake of unlocking the secret of all the animations contained within.

One of the key differences between the Chinese and Western versions of chess is the limited movement of the King and his immediate entourage; they can only move in a 3 x 3 square known as the 'Imperial Palace'.

Another, highly unusual, difference is that pieces have a tendency to turn round and fart in the faces of their adversaries. But this is **Battle Chess** (II), where all sorts of strange things happen.

Animated pieces march up and down the board in vivid colour to stirring music (via an AdLib soundboard). Ministers turn into elephants and dragons get electrocuted. To describe all the various metamorphoses that occur would be like telling your children what they're getting for Christmas. So, on with the game.

Battle Chess II can be played against the computer, or against another human either face-to-face or via Modem. Eight different levels of play are available. Play options include taking moves back, forcing the computer to make a move if it's taking too long, and setting up the game as you wish so as to practice different strategies.

Dim Sums

After a couple of hours getting thrashed on 'Novice' level I was able to give the machine some of its own medicine. Pretty soon I was doing the same on Level 2. From this you can conclude either that a) I have a brilliant career ahead of me as a chess grandmaster, or, b) the programmer hadn't done his sums. It is not false modesty that inclines me towards the latter option.

Just to make sure I was not missing out on a new career opportunity I elected to play on the top level. All this did was reinforce my prejudices stated at the beginning of this review, as the cyborg took 15 minutes to make each move. The ensuing boredom was compounded when it made the same (opening) move as it did on the novice level.

Of course you can set a time limit per move, but this defeats the object of the exercise insofar as the computer makes the same move that it would on a lower level. In practical terms the best level appears to be around 5. On this strata the computer takes around five minutes to 'think' and make moves of a reasonable quality, though even here I was able to force a draw because of the cyborg's passivity (the result of poor programming).

Genghis Was An Egghead!

The manual explains everything very clearly without coming over all technical. It has also hit upon the excellent wheeze of including some annotations of historical matches so you can replay the 'expert' moves. You'll be surprised to learn that Genghis Khan was something of an expert at the game, despite his current reputation as a barbarian slightly to the right of Norman Tebbit.

The board is something of a problem at first in that the sheer size of the pieces obscures their true position. This is alleviated to some extent by being able to access a '2-D' view of the board with non-animated pieces. Unless you want to drop some real clangers, it's essential that you use this option frequently, though there is a 'take back move' option should your opponent be a decent sort of chap (or chapette).

If you've never played chess of any description before, then **Battle Chess II** is a good way to learn in spite of the aforementioned reservations. It is also an excellent way to introduce children to the mysteries of the chessboard. It is very impressive visually, and above all is fun – the essential catalyst of learning. As a two player game it gets a wholehearted recommendation. Playing solo against the machine is more problematic. But if you're looking for another **Chessmaster 2000** then buy **Chessmaster 2100** instead. SP

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Published by
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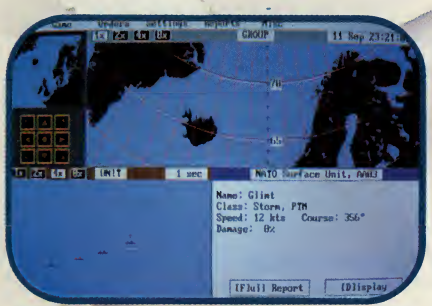

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SeeingStars?

Strategy in SSI's Stellar Crusade, by Joseph S McMaster

IN THE course of this article, I will lay out several strategic and tactical recommendations and methodologies, which, if followed by the reader, should allow him or her to annihilate a computer opponent or turn any human foe into a contemptible, quivering mass of jelly. Well, okay, maybe that's putting it too strongly. But at least the computer won't sneer at you any more.

This article is the result of many hours of play and of additional hours of discussion with Mr Norman C Koger Jr, designer of **Stellar Crusade**. All hints are directed to the Corporate League player in the Long Campaign Scenario with the computer set at the 'challenging' (medium) level.

Bucks

In the Long Campaign Scenario of **Stellar Crusade**, planning must begin with the establishment of a sound economic base. This is really not all that difficult since the computer will help the player a great deal.

Players are aware that the computer fashions quarterly economic reports. The computer also gives economic advice and, moreover, the advice is quite good.

Nevertheless, this advice is not to be followed blindly. The computer can help to maximise only the economic base and only with the star systems which currently constitute that base. Early on, the computer advises only with respect to maximising the output of Alger and Laird's Star. Therefore, one should decline to follow the computer's directions until the exploration teams have expanded the economic base to include the so-called 'perfect system', that is, a system whose inherent habitability, metal and organic wealth is close to optimal. Upon discovery, immediately build ten factory kits (this number includes the four kits the player starts with) and ship them to the new system. Colonists will also be needed to operate them. Afterwards, the player should begin to follow the computer's strictures as closely as possible.

Even so, do not follow the computer unthinkingly. For instance, it is important to invest heavily in research early in the game. Research money spent early is of more usefulness than research expenditures later; one reaps their benefits for a longer part of the game. Against the computer, when you have achieved Effectiveness 9 or better, you can virtually abandon this part of the budget; I have never seen the computer advance beyond Effectiveness 8. In a two player game it would probably be wisest to stay even with the opponent and continue spending money in this area.

The basic idea here is to increase the technological level, the Effectiveness, before the construction of the main warships commences. Of course, if the opponent begins at a higher Effectiveness than you, this is even more vital. At any rate, aside from the initial heavy research commitment, the player should follow the computer's economic advice fairly closely. This state of affairs continues until about 2325.

At this time, there is a necessity to divert larger and larger sums away from economic expansion, since the computer is programmed to consider only economic factors. By 2325, however, military urgencies present a growing influence. Now the player must begin to diverge from the computer's observations to an even greater extent. Production of warships must be speeded up, even at the cost of economic expansion.

Boats

There is no doubt that the sundry decisions involved in the production of warships presents the most fertile and crucial area of strategic thinking to be found in **Stellar Crusade**. The main problem is the restriction to a 120 ship navy. This ceiling forces you to milk every ounce of usefulness out of every ship built. This need affects many later considerations.

I realise that some sentiment may be attached to those original ship designs provided for us by the game designer, but the simple fact is, many are not suited to our needs. Ignore them!

The 'Mordecai Fae' class is a particularly blatant example. With a limit of 120 ships, one can only devote so many hulls to transports. Therefore, when a ship is built for a certain purpose, maximise its utility for that purpose. All transports must have the maximum number of cargo bays. The 'Mordecai Fae' has only four. It should be discontinued. The 'Working Girl' class has only eight. It, too, should be discontinued. However, 'Working Girl' ships which were already under construction at the beginning of the game should be completed rather than waste the build points which have already been expended on them.

No, the only transport worth building is one with fifteen cargo bays. For this one can still employ one of the game's original designs, the 'Explorer' class.

The overriding necessity to get as much value from every ship should play a major role in the player's own designs. As for suggested designs, perhaps the single most important one which I can pass on to the reader is what I refer to as the 'Viper' class.

The 'Viper' class, to be built in the small shipyards at Laird's Star, was developed as an offshoot of that venerable original design, the 'Snake'; hence the name. Be aware that the computer opponent is limited to building only those ship designs which the game designer gave it. An inspection of those designs reveals a shocking lack of anti-i weaponry. Thus, the 'Snake' and its cousin the

Stellar Crusade was designed by Norman C Koger, jr and is published by SSI/US Gold

The game is available for all formats, and retails for £24.99

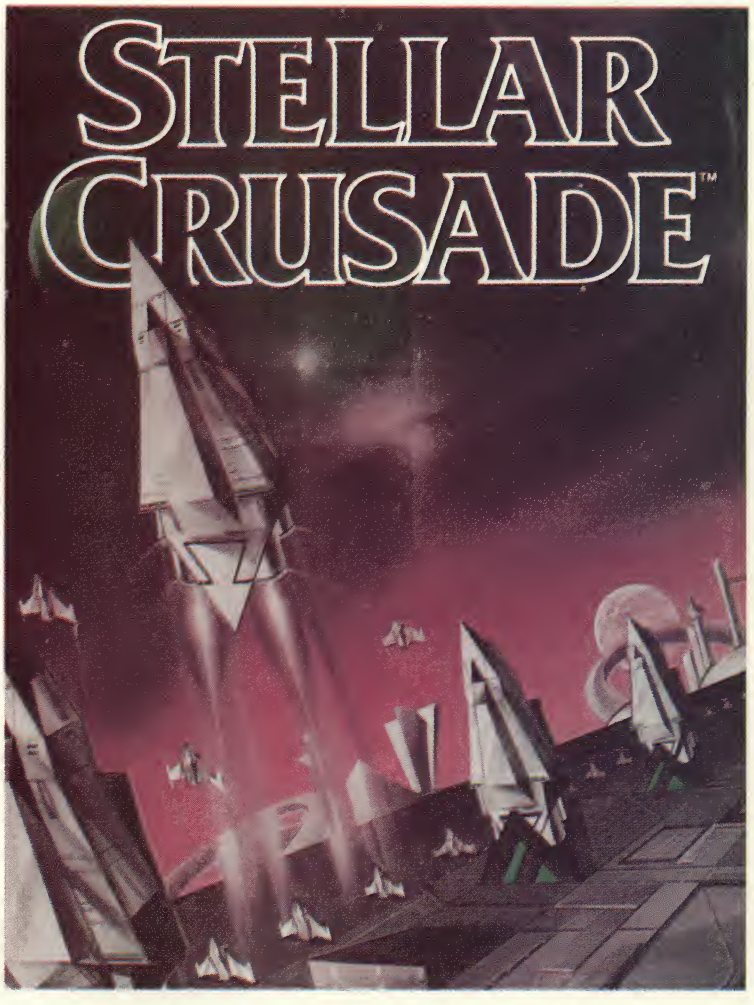
'Viper', both of which are equipped with the i-Space drive, are relatively immune from attack even in an exchange involving massed battle fleets.

The 'Viper' modifies the original 'Snake' design by deleting one short range weapon and installing a command module. The purpose is twofold. First, the player is able to test untried commanders in relative safety by sending them into battle leading a small fleet of two or three 'Vipers'. While they sit securely in i-Space, you are able to get a read on their offensive and defensive capabilities. In fact, I recommend maintaining two small 'Viper' fleets at the enemy's Brotherhood star system. Then just leave the ships there and merely assign your untested commanders there and then reassign them elsewhere once you have tested them out. Occasionally the i-Space drives will break down or the command modules deteriorate and some ships will have to be withdrawn for repairs. It is still an extremely effective method to discover the commanders' strengths. With leadership modifiers playing such an important role in **Stellar Crusade**, the urgency of their discovery cannot be overemphasised.

Secondly, after the 'Vipers' serve as testing stations for your leaders, they are reassigned to the main battle fleets as command ships, generally two or three per fleet (in case one is damaged). In this way, the main battleships do not have to include a command module in their design. The result is that more weapons and defences are available to the standard twenty ship fleet than otherwise would be possible. The 'Viper' enables one to get as much as possible from the battle ship design.

Finally, while the strategies surrounding the 'Viper' class were developed for use against a computer opponent, they should, nevertheless, be employable against a human enemy. The pre-designed ships included in the game rightly reflect the game's emphasis on anti-R weaponry. Even a human opponent will design ships primarily armed this way. However, when playing against another person, be forewarned of the possibility that he or she may surprise you with a small fleet of ships armed with anti-i weapons. It would be easy enough for the enemy to draw some ships out of Escort Command, where the emphasis is on anti-i weapons. These ships, which were originally designed to hunt the 'Snake' vessels of your Raiding Command, also make excellent 'Viper' killers.

At this juncture, while I am discussing the 'Viper', let me give you a warning regarding all ships equipped with i-Space drives. In direct contravention of the rules manual, it is possible for anti-R weapons to damage an i-Space ship. Fortunately, the possibility is extremely small and ordinarily unnoticeable. However, if you follow my advice on testing your leaders in i-Space ships, you will occasionally be surprised to see one damaged or destroyed even when opposing a force which is armed with nothing but anti-R weapons. Interestingly, this is not a true glitch in the game program.



In my discussions with the game's designer, he confirmed my discovery of the anti-R effect on i-Space ships. Mr Koger explained that in the early development of **Stellar Crusade**, anti-R weapons were indeed, harmful to i-Space ships. As the game grew and changed, however, it was decided to make i-Space ships immune to attack from such weapons. Nevertheless, the tiny chance of injury which remains in the game is there because it was embedded so deeply in one of the program's subroutines, that to remove it would have meant a major restructuring of the entire program.

In a similar situation, some of you may have already discovered that among the pre-designed ships of the People's Holy Republic, are two transport vessel classes ('Goliath' and 'Trinity') which are exactly alike! Again, Mr Koger explained that in an earlier incarnation of the game, the 'Trinity' class, of which there is only one member, was intended to be a very special ship. In the final version it lost its uniqueness, but the anomaly of the twin class designs remained.

To return to the subject at hand, I advise other diversions from the use of the pre-designed ships. I designed the 'Henchman' class purely for escort duty. One of the primary influences there was cost. Because time is so short, Escort Command has to be built up as quickly as possible. The easiest method of accomplishing this was to design and build an inexpensive warship. However, the pre-designed 'Wasp' and 'Hawk' were probably too economical. Thus, the 'Henchman' was born. The design did not include a command module since escort duty does not benefit from good leadership.

Also, the ship mounts one long range anti-R weapon as well as a long range anti-i weapon. Against a human opponent, including the anti-R weapon would be a mistake. A human opponent would fill Raiding Command with vessels equipped with i-Space drives, such good raiders they make. However, the computer opponent exhibits a propensity for stocking its Raiding Command with ships lacking the i-Space drive, mainly 'Wrath of God' and 'Charles Martel' classes.

Finally, the 'Henchman' design was rounded out with two short range anti-R weapons, as well as the obligatory scanners for the long range weapons. The resulting ship comes in at 16 build points, a real bargain.

A second area where a pre-design is to be rejected is in the main battle-

ships. The 'Lion' class is not used since one should try to eliminate command modules on the capital ships and because a greater emphasis should be placed on long range weapons.

I suggest two designs, one to replace the other as Effectiveness increases. The first battleship I call the 'Imp'. It has three R scanners, three long range anti-R weapons, and three long range defences. If it is built after Effectiveness 7 is reached, which I recommend, the three scanners ensure 100% lock ons for your long range weapons. If you can find a force commander with a defence rating of five, the defences also obtain 100% lock ons. If you note the total lack of short range weapons, you will have some clue as to the ship's operational use. After the enemy's main battle fleets have been located by your 'Vipers', a fleet of 'Viper' led 'Imps' is sent in for a quick hit and run attack. In the first round of combat, most of the fleet's weapons and defences will be expended and the player must thereafter attempt to disengage as quickly as possible. After disengaging, return to a friendly system and make repairs.

The effect of a series of these hit and run attacks on the computer's fleets is quite devastating. First, your ships should, by this time, be at a higher Effectiveness and thus more combat worthy. Second, you should already know most of your leaders' abilities and a capable one will be in command of the fleet. But third and most importantly, the computer's battleships, with their short range weapons, are designed for sustained combat and not for these quick, guerrilla type attacks.

After Effectiveness 9 is reached, stop production of the 'Imp' and begin production of the 'Daemon' class. The 'Daemon' mounts one R-scanner (which yields 100% weapon lock on at that Effectiveness), four long range anti-R weapons, two short range anti-R weapons, and two long range defences. It is built for the sustained combat necessary for the conquest of enemy star systems, although with the overkill it employs in long range weapons, the combat may turn out to go rather quickly.

Lastly, if you are playing against a human instead of a computer opponent, skip the construction of the 'Imp' class and instead build a lesser version of the 'Daemon' as your first battleship. A human opponent is more likely to be making sustained attacks against your star systems at an earlier time and you will need ships with which you can stand and fight.

I found the pre-designed troop transport, the 'Spiderbird', to be unnecessarily ostentatious. All weapons and defences are trimmed away, as well as the command module, in order to bring the ship in at a reasonable cost. I do suggest keeping all eight assault compartments, however. Budgetary limitations generally keep the player from fielding too many different ship or troop types. I direct these limits toward troop types and only create Heavy Regulars as they are the best troops. Unfortunately, they do require eight assault compartments. Still, even if you build some other troop type, you may some day find the extra space a boon. At any rate, 'Vipers' will again be needed as command ships to lead the 'Dragonseed' assault ships.

While I do not carry on any covert activities, if you choose to, make sure you build the proper support ship. Because any ship will do here, and because ships in Special Support are subject to catastrophic loss, cost is the only factor involved. The 'Gnat' has one command module as its sole operating system and costs but a single build point to manufacture. I should also like to point out here that one should resist the urge to transfer the pre-war 'Mordecai Faes' from the Transport Pool to Special Support. While in the Transport Pool, these vessels help to screen the more valuable 'Working Girls' and 'Explorers' from enemy raiders.

If you are wondering why I do not employ covert activities it is simply because money limitations force the player to cut corners somewhere and because the computer defends itself extraordinarily well in this area. The game designer explained that this was required because if left unchecked, the fomenting of rebellions is absolutely devastating to the victim. As it is, I find one may protect oneself from the computer by spending two build points per turn (and every turn) on internal security. Later on, you should also have troops garrisoned at all of your producing systems and this will prevent rebellions. Against human opponents, internal security expenditures will almost certainly have to be higher, possibly fourfold.

In my discussion of the battleships above, I alluded to a certain order in which they were to be constructed. In fact, all ships should be created in a definite 'build order'. This saves on retooling costs and allows ships to be constructed according to both need and to take advantage of increasing technology. As I mentioned before, much of the early budget is directed toward research. The early jumps in Effectiveness level help determine construction order.

Transports are built first, even when still at Effectiveness 4. Since most of these ships are to be posted to the Transport Pool, they have no need for increased speed. And, of course, as transports they do not mount weapons and do not benefit from improved weaponry.

After the transports are completed, turn to raiders. Although the jump to Effectiveness 5 should occur around this time, don't bother to retool once 'Snake' production has begun. Like transports, raiders spend most of their lives in Raiding Command where speed does not matter. And, strangely enough, Raiding Command ships, unlike other warships, do not receive advantages from increased weapons technology. The only reason raiders are begun after transports is because it might be necessary to occasionally pull 'Snakes' out of Raiding Command for general fleet assignment. There, greater speed and combat ability will have value. Thus, because you at least want the chance to initiate their construction after Effectiveness 5 has been achieved, they are begun after transports.

Escorts come next. Ships in Escort Command do benefit from better weapons and construction should not begin until Effectiveness 5 is achieved. Like transports and raiders, however, the increased speed is not noticed unless they are withdrawn from Escort Command and used in general fleet operations.

Let me also point out here that raiders and escorts should be completed before other warships because of more pressing need. As in most wars, the strategic and economic war breaks out before the actual encounters between battle fleets. **Stellar Crusade** is no exception. Indeed, your raiders and escorts should see several years of action before your battleships are even needed. And do not skimp on your raiders and escorts! If there is one thing both the designer and myself wholeheartedly agreed upon, it was that the strategic war was the most vital facet of the entire game. You cannot afford to lose here.

As mentioned before, construction of the main battle fleets should be delayed until Effectiveness 7 is reached. At that time, simultaneously begin building 'Imp' battleships at Alger and 'Viper' command ships at

Laird's Star. These ships benefit the most from increasing technology. Because of this, these designs are periodically upgraded. Although retooling costs prohibit this at every rise in Effectiveness, certainly it may be considered at every two increases and definitely is done after three.

The last ships to be built are the 'Dragonseed' troop transports. This decision is based on need rather than on technology, although these troop ships do gain from the speed increase. Basically, there is no need for troop transports until one has battle fleets to protect them.

Bigwigs

It is quite correct that the influence of leadership is incredibly powerful and ever present in **Stellar Crusade**. That is particularly why so much effort goes into discovering the leaders' qualities.

Leaders are rated for attack ability, defence ability, and ground assault ability. Despite this elaborate rating systems, questions still arise. Suppose three leaders rate out 5-3-n, 3-5-n, and 4-4-n. Which would be best to lead a main battle fleet? I'm afraid the answer is somewhat of a judgement call, but certain factors should be considered.

Look to the design of the ships comprising that fleet. If the ships are bristling with long range weapons, generally opt for the 5-3-n.

Likewise, if defensive systems predominate, the 3-5-n is chosen. The rule is to match the best with the most. But there are exceptions and it is important to recognise them. I remember that at one early point in a game I matched a 3-5-n with a fleet where offensive systems were the most numerous. Why? Because at that time battleships were scarce and very dear. More importantly, the ships were at Effectiveness 7 and the use of a five defensive rating insured that 100% of our long range defences would intercept incoming weapons. The actual maths involved is based on a formula: 3 x firing ship effectiveness x force commander's defensive rating = per cent chance to intercept; or 3 x 7 x 5= 105%.

There are other exceptions, but the best preparation for future conflicts is to know the formulae underlying basic combat. Knowing how many of a task force's long range weapons will fire is a good example. This formula is 50 x commander's attack rating x enemy targets available for that weapon type (anti-R or anti-i) at the beginning of a round / total number of weapons of that type available to the firer at the beginning of the round = per cent of weapons which will fire. Your calculations will not yield exact results because of a random number modifier which is applied to the result, but your prediction should be close (except when there are few weapons because here the random number has a greater effect).

Another formula to be aware of is that which results from opting for aggressiveness in battle. This option, if you will recall, increases the probability of achieving hits and lock ons by both sides. The formula is a flat multiplier of 1.25 applied to the hits achieved by both sides in a battle. This leads to an interesting tactical situation.

At Effectiveness 9, where your long range weapons will obtain 100% hits and lock ons anyway, and facing a fleet of lesser ships, the temptation is to not attack aggressively. It would seem that only your opponent would benefit from greater hit numbers. This is not the case. Indeed, if your ships fire ten long range weapons, and the enemy has no long range defences left, and you choose to attack aggressively, then you will obtain 12.5 hits instead of the expected 10! Of course, if the enemy had only ten or fewer ships, then you are back to the point where it probably does not make sense to attack aggressively.

Lastly, I should note that the mathematics of ground combat were misstated in the rules manual. For each unit in ground combat the following formula must be employed: commander's assault rating (or system defence rating) x unit strength x unit capability / 5 = per cent chance of eliminating an enemy unit. After each unit has been computed, the numbers are totalled to find the total per cent chance of eliminating an enemy unit. To use an actual example, let us suppose we have two Heavy Regular units (Str=4, Cap=8, and Str=3, Cap=8) assaulting an enemy system. They are being led by a leader rated n-n-4. For the first unit, (4 x 4 x 8) / 5 = 25.6. The fraction is dropped and the result is 25%. The second unit ((4 x 3 x 8) / 5 = 19.2) yields another 19% for a total chance of elimination of an enemy unit of 44%.

I hope the information in this article has been of assistance to the reader. Please keep in mind that it is intended to be neither exhaustive nor absolute in authority. There is still plenty of room for fresh thought in **Stellar Crusade**. For instance the game's designer mentioned an acquaintance who had taken my 'Viper' idea one step further; he designed an i-Space ship with two cargo compartments, trained some Special Forces, and then proceeded to discover all of his leaders' assault ratings as well as attack and defence. It sounds expensive, but I'm going to give it a try!

As a final reminder, the hints contained in this article have been written for play at the 'challenging' computer level. For those more adventurous souls among you who play at the 'hairy' or 'hideous' levels, a minor change in strategy is strongly urged: when war breaks out at these levels, you must have your most important systems fully garrisoned with full strength Heavy Regulars troops. At the 'hideous' level, the computer becomes incredibly aggressive, invading and reinvading your most treasured possessions. So, Beware!

Author's Commentary

I should like to point out that the reference in the last section to the mathematics of ground combat being misstated refers to the fact that the **Stellar Crusade** rules manual inadvertently omitted the '5' divisor. This was an understandable mistake. What is less comprehensible is that SSI voluntarily chose to leave out several entire formulae of the mathematics of **Stellar Crusade**. The more important of these have been included in the above article.

To SSI's credit, the company continues to be extremely consumer responsive. Both Graeme Bayless and David Shelly spent time with me discussing the game and putting me in touch with the designer. It was explained that the original rules manual contained so much mathematics that it was feared that the reader would be overwhelmed. This was confirmed by the designer. May I suggest to SSI and others in the industry a reasonable compromise? Simply leave the various formulae out of the body of the rules text, but include them in a separate appendix at the end. In this manner they are out of the way, but still there for those of us who desire them. After all, why create a strategy game, especially one as clever as **Stellar Crusade**, and then remove the player's ability to make reasoned, strategic choices?

Finally I would like to thank Norman Koger, designer of **Stellar Crusade**, for his time in going over the maths and strategy tips with me. Sorry I knocked some of your ship designs, O mighty creator of universes. SP

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THE IMMORTAL

by Dave Morris

IT'S DIFFICULT to know quite how to categorise this game. It's sort of an arcade-adventure, though with a strong slant towards the adventure part of the mix that places it a cut above the average offering in that genre.

Sweet Dreams

You take the role of a kind of fighter-mage who must penetrate the labyrinth beneath the ruined city of Erinoch to find out what has happened to your old mentor, Mordamir. He was exploring for the dragon's lair that lies buried under the city, but something has befallen him – according to the portents you received in your dreams.

Therein lies one of the game's principal delights. Every so often you must sleep (on little patches of straw found here and there in the labyrinth) and, while sleeping, your dreams serve as continuing insights on the plot. For instance, while tossing and turning on one level I found myself pondering the hostile tribes of goblins and trolls that had been vexing my progress. They seemed not altogether unintelligent, my dream-self mused; perhaps I could strike a bargain with them…

In fact the same thing had already occurred to me from reading between the lines in the game manual, but these little hints do help develop the atmosphere.

Graphically the game is very good indeed. You are given a scrolling 3-D view of the labyrinth in which you can see yourself trolling around as though from a vantage point about fifteen feet off the ground. This lacks the nail-biting immediacy of, say, **Dungeon Master**'s first-hand view, but in fact it sits rather well with **The Immortal**'s slightly more refined and elegant style.

Atmospheric Setting

The graphics, music and mordant humour of the game all combined to make me feel I was in some adventure from Clark Ashton Smith's Averoigne stories. If I could have heard the goblins, I'm sure they would have sounded like Peter Lorre in *The Raven!* Altogether **The Immortal** has a vastly more atmospheric and effective setting than most computer adventures achieve.

There are points that need criticising, though. Combat is handled by toggling the joystick according to whether you want to slash (winding up for a mighty blow), do a quick thrust or just parry. Coordination is all-important, and since combats can be pretty deadly until you get the hang of what you are doing, you might end up starting the adventure over several times. Oh yes – there's no easy saving of the game every time a spot of trouble looms ahead: each time you get killed, you have to go back to the start of that level. This can get a mite repetitive if you are as cack-handed as I am.

Staff Breaks

Similarly, there are pits strewn around the labyrinth, and although it is possible to get out (you are shown supporting yourself across the pit by your staff, giving you a few seconds before it breaks) this is a tricky knack to learn. I think it would have helped to have a 'training ground' option where you could hone the necessary skills before setting out.

All in all, though, a clever, thoughtful and atmospheric adventure. SP

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BUCK ROGERS

Countdown To Doomsday

by Theo Clarke

IT IS the year 2456. Buck Rogers, a man who has survived half a millennium frozen in space, has become the hero of the New Earth Organisation (NEO) in their rebellion against the repressive plutocracy of the Russo-American Mercantile (RAM). In **Countdown to Doomsday** the player leads a team of NEO recruits into premature combat.

The package contains two manuals, a card of hardware-specific data and a paperback novel. The novel is the *First Power Play* – the first volume in The Inner Planets Trilogy. Criticism of the literary style of any pulp fiction misses the point because the tale is the thing. In this case the story has a racy appeal even though it engenders no eager anticipation for the next two volumes.

Manual Override

The manuals are far less satisfying. Their structure is unclear and there is no convincing reason for publishing them in two booklets. Players who are familiar with TSR's **Buck Rogers** role-playing game will already be familiar with the background material in the first half of the Log Book but the log entries in the other half are specific to this particular game. The Rule Book does cover the nuts and bolts of the game mechanics, but the split is arbitrary.

Fistful Of Dragons

SSI have already produced a fistful of **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons** products and this addition to the TSR canon uses the system developed for the **AD&D** computer role-playing games like **Pool of Radiance**. This mechanism looked good when it was first released but subsequent games like **Ultima VI** have left it far behind. **Countdown to Doomsday** is a disappointing game because of this lack of development.

TSR role-playing games tend to be heavy with statistics. Computers can remove the toil of character generation but combat is sluggish and artificial if the conversion is no more than the automation of the dice rolls. This game system gives a continuous textual account of each dice roll and the use of animated explosions and synthesised laser sounds is inadequate compensation. It is difficult to suspend disbelief when the system says 'Argle Furgle makes his tactics roll'. The combat sequences can be speeded up by passing control to the computer for fully automated combat but the skirmishes make dull viewing.

There should be more than combat to a role-playing game, of course. There should be puzzles to solve and environments to explore. The puzzles in the early stages of the game are solved by methodical plodding and the images of the environment are uninspiring. In some areas it is possible to see a bird's eye view but most game movement gives a character's view point which makes mapping a slow chore. There are some rewarding graphic images but they are not enough to merit continued play.

Pre Programmed

The game may appeal to character-generation enthusiasts and dedicated shoppers but once the adventure begins there seem to be few options available and the game often feels pre-programmed. This was a common failing of early face-to-face role-playing games before the possibilities of the form were realised. Newcomers to such games may enjoy this guidance but experienced gamers are likely to find it irksome.

Expansive RAM

There is a lot of material to entertain people who like this sort of thing. There are seventy-one entries in the Log Book which are provided because the game mechanism does not lend itself to more than a few lines of text on any screen. Reading the log indicates that the party will visit most of the planets in the Solar System in their attempt to disable the four Doomsday devices aimed at Earth by the forces of RAM.

It is clear that there is an exciting adventure hiding inside the system. Perhaps it will be published as a module for face-to-face adventuring and interested players will be able to enjoy the inventive plot without the intrusion of the obstructive computer mechanism. SP

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CAUGHT IN THE NET

by Max Matrix

ELECTRONIC Zoo! I mean, what kind of name is that for a software company? Does it only employ animals? If so, maybe they can solve **The Secret of Monkey Island** – one of the all-time great game titles. Not since Major Lance wrote 'Monkey Time' have I felt so proud of my fellow simians. Several readers (well, one) have enquired about not only my origins, but also my name. The fact of the matter is my keeper is something of a film buff, and was quite taken with Oshima's *Max Mon Amour*. This, of course, was the film in which Charlotte Rampling fell in love, and into bed with, the eponymous Max – one of my brethren, though not quite so handsome.

But hey! 'What's in a name,' you cry. As it happens, quite a lot these days. A recurring problem has been the use of boardgame titles for the computer games. Some companies have been pretty lax checking the TM directory with the result that names have had to be hastily changed following the intervention of m'learned friends. One company which did do its homework was Virgin Mastertronic. The company's **Supremacy** game is to get a new title in the US to avoid a name clash with the boardgame of the same name. Speaking of which Bob Simpsom, supreme commander at Supremacy, tells me that a software conversion of the eponymous game is 'two thirds complete'.

IN ISSUE #1 I made some, er, catty remarks about Avalon Hill's decision to publish **Third Reich** on the ST first. It seems other gamers thought this a bit potty too, prompting a response from AH software chief John Huff in the latest issue of the company's house mag, *General:* 'The developer preferred to do the initial release on this (the ST) machine. When the project started, the IBM machines did not have sufficient graphics to handle the job. Now, with the availability of inexpensive EGA and VGA systems, it does. Computer **Third Reich** will be released on the Amiga and the IBM after the ST version is complete.

For those readers who may have seen the alpha-version at Origins'89, you will have to be patient for a few more months. The computer games currently in production are being very carefully scrutinized to avoid some of the mistakes that have plagued us in the past.' Mr Huff, now not in a huff anymore, goes on to describe some of the plans that AH has for future IBM releases. These include: **Conqueror** – an empire building game which has 58 countries on another world. Each player uses their knowledge of economics, warfare, and espionage to guide their country as best they can. **Tokyo Express** – a full implementation of the boardgame by its designer, Jon Southard. There will also be a computer version of the classic boardgame, **Acquire**. As someone who was privileged enough to playtest this I can tell you that it is a faithful rendition of the boardgame. Unfortunately, though, the computer played like imbeciles, though Mr Huff assures us that this has now been corrected.

NEW YORK, New York. My kind of town, probably, I guess, because most of the inhabitants look like apes. Except, that is, the wonderful folks who attended Intertainment '90 at the Marriot Hotel in Manhattan.

GOING it alone seems to be all the fashion for programmers these days. First to declare UDI were the Bitmap Brothers who have formed a seemingly unlikely alliance with Rhythm King Records. The outcome of this partnership is Renegade – a games development company which believes that 'artists is *(sic)* an asset – not a disposable commodity'. Like grammar? Fair do's, though, Renegade will offer its artists a 'unique profit share deal', which is vastly different from the software business, where they (and many others) claim that royalties are often 'forgotten'.

The reason for the brothers' disaffection was not simply cash, though. These boys are aesthetes. They claim that the software publishers packaged their irrelevent cheapo games in irrelevent cheapo artwork! Unfortunately our snotty editor considers most of the lads' games too down market to be featured in this magazine, though he has condescended to feature **Cadaver**. Rumours that Bullfrog, who programmed **Populous** for Electronic Arts, have also come over all indie are unconfirmed.

UMSII! The heartbreak! The drama! The tragedy! In fact, just about everything except the game. The latest word on this epic-to-be is that problems have arisen in the Second World War scenario wherein swastikas are depicted. Unfortunately (or fortunately, perhaps) graphic displays of the evil icon are *verboden* in Germany.

Programmer Ezra Sidhan is still pressing on with the Gulf scenario though this too is a hot potato. Questions have already been asked in congress regarding the suitability of such games. **UMSII**, you may recall, is the game which was 'reviewed' a couple of months ago by a magazine that prides itself on reviewing only 'finished games', prompting one wag to say: 'pretty soon they'll be reviewing *ideas* for games'. SP

THE FINAL BATTLE

Last Rites

by John Scott

You thought that all was well. You and your four companions had imprisoned the evil wizard Suzar; you had located the legendary sword and shield of Anar. But now the evil sod has escaped, murdered all but two of your friends, and made off with the sword and shield. You yourself are lying in a dank dark cell. To prevent Suzar destroying your world, you'll have to escape, rescue your friends and find the six power crystals which can stop his magic.

3-D Hell

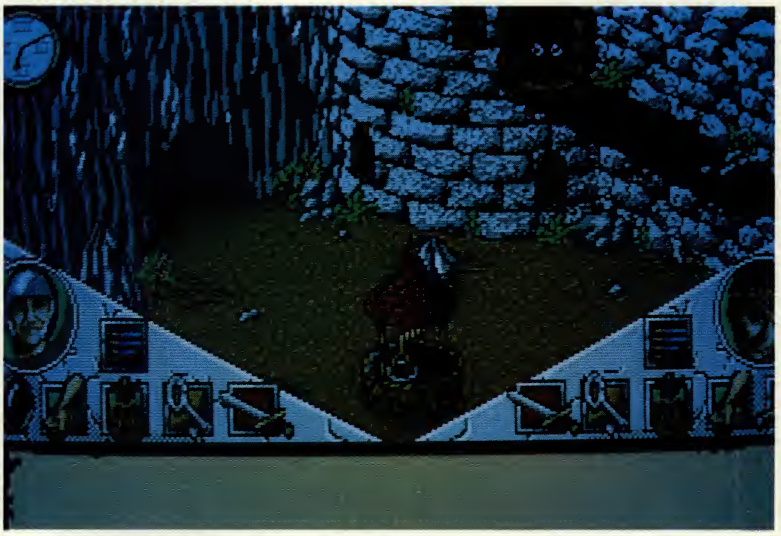
The Final Battle is a game in two parts: Initially you wander around the countryside solving the various puzzles entirely at your own pace (or as long as supplies last). Then, in part two, you enter the fortress of Anar by night and the pressure is on. You must complete your quest, destroy Suzar, and get out of the castle before it collapses into Hell – and you must do it all before dawn.

On loading up, you are presented with a picture of your current location – the cell. Every location has its own picture, presented in very 3-dimensional looking isometric projection. Many programs (such as **Populous, Escape from the Planet of Robot Monsters**) have used this as a background for animated action, so that it's initially disappointing to see that this game has no animation at all.

Dressed Up

Everything in the game is mouse controlled, but I felt that overall, this is a graphically dressed-up text adventure of the old school. All the puzzles are of the classic find-the-key-unlock-the-door or find-the-hammer-hit-the-nail type. This is not to say that they're easy. Some are, but others require heavy use of the little grey cells.

Timing can also be crucial: The first few times I played, I wasted a lot of time escaping from the cell and releasing a fellow prisoner. Then I came across a room with two corpses and a sacrificial slab. There didn't seem to be anything to do there, so I assumed that it was just an 'atmospheric' location. It was only later that I discovered that it's possible to get there before the sacrifice occurs, and therefore rescue your two companions.



Eventually you will acquire four friends in total, and they can travel as a party or as individuals. In some locations only one person can enter, so it's important to be aware of their individual skills and weaknesses.

RAM It Home

All around the view screen are the various icons which enable all the actions and interactions necessary to complete the quest. You can listen, look, eat, fight, throw, rest, talk, and so on. It is also possible to access a map which builds up as you visit each location. A really neat feature is the ability to target a destination on the map and then use the GOTO icon to move there without the need to click your way from area to area.

There is also, thankfully, a help key. The game-save options include not only the usual disc routine, but also the ability to save or load from RAM. I wish more adventures did this.

The weather conditions are randomly generated, and add a certain amount of atmosphere to the game, as when thunder rolls over the countryside. Weather also affects what can and cannot be done – you can't climb a slippery tree trunk when it's wet, for example, and conditions (weather and terrain) affect your speed of travel. As the hours pass, night follows day and, once again, some actions are only safe under cover of darkness.

There is no music, and sound effects are quite minimal. During the hours of darkness there is a continuous cicada drone, there are some weather noises, and a few sampled spot effects – nothing spectacular. Graphically the game is fine, but could be better. Often the text doesn't give a complete list of objects in a location, so you have to look carefully at the illustration. Sometimes objects are so small or unobtrusive as to be practically invisible.

On calling up the character statistics screen you are given a picture of your character as a loincloth-clad male barbarian – even when the character is a female! Shame.

The Final Battle is not, thankfully, yet another addition to the plethora of Role-Play epics in the tradition of **AD&D, Ultima**, and so on ad infinitum. It is, as I've said, a somewhat jazzed up text adventure without the keyboard interface. The emphasisis very much on puzzle solving rather than on a strong linear storyline. Having said that, I liked it, and will probably keep going back to it until I send Suzar back to Hell – where he belongs. SP

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CARMEN SANDIEGO

Where In The World Is..., Where In The USA Is... and Where In Europe Is...?

by Theo Clarke

Edinburgh
Wednesday, 9 P.M.
Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland, has a rich cultural and intellectual heritage. It is often called the Athens of the North. London, in southern England, is the capital of the entire United Kingdom.

Where In Europe Is Carmen Diego?

CARMEN Sandiego leads the Villains' International League of Evil (VILE), a gang specialising in audacious thefts of historic treasures. The newest recruit of the Acme Detective Agency has been assigned to track down the felon responsible for the latest theft.

These three games (**Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego, Where in the USA is Carmen Sandiego,** and **Where in Europe is Carmen Sandiego**) are, as their titles suggest, very similar. The player moves from city to city gaining snippets of information about the culprit. In each game there are about a dozen possible criminals on file. Once sufficient data has been obtained to uniquely identify an individual the detective can raise a warrant. A detective with a warrant can arrest the criminal upon reaching their hiding place.

The World's Your Oyster

Where in the World... was first released in the US in 1985 and used the crude CGA graphics that were then the standard IBM display. This limitation was turned to advantage by designing bold, simple graphics that reflect the direct charm of the game. This simplicity has been maintained throughout the series and the same philosophy has been applied to the accompanying sound effects.

Each game session starts with a signing on process. Once a new player has registered as a member of the Acme Detective Agency all subsequent games are personalised and a Hall of Fame scoreboard is maintained. A session can consist of any number of cases and each case follows the same format. The detective is informed of a theft, its location and the deadline by which the case must be solved. The Statue of Liberty's torch and the Red Baron's scarf are typical targets for VILE and the detective starts the investigation at the location of the theft.

Give Us A Clue

Upon arriving at a city a panel of geographic information is displayed and the detective can choose one of three locations to further investigate. At each location they may get a clue about the culprit's next destination or an identifying feature. The destinations are cities and each city only has air links to a few others. The clues involve geographical data and the player needs to make extensive use of the comprehensive reference book that comes with each game.

These reference books are standard volumes which are of interest in their own right. **Where in the World...** comes with The World Almanac, a 1000-page geographical encyclopaedia. **Where in Europe...** uses a concise American atlas of Europe. Clues such as 'she left in a boat flying a red and green flag' or 'her grandfather was Kurdish' can be deciphered by consulting the books.

It soon becomes apparent that these games are educational software in disguise. There is very little strategic thinking involved but adults can increase the level of difficulty by playing without reference to the books. This reduces the series to little more than an attractively packaged trivia quiz but the deductive element and the charming lack of pretension greatly enhances their appeal. Intelligent eight year olds and upwards will become engrossed and even peripatetic know-alls like our Editor may learn a thing or two. SP

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THE ULTIMA(TE) STORY

Simon Corvinus on Lord British and chums

LIKE HOLLYWOOD, but with rather more justification, the games software industry has a Holy Grail, and its name is Sequels: in the increasingly expensive and competitive world of computer role-playing games (CRPGs), a single great game is nice, but a successful series of sequels will keep the customers rolling in for years. These days it seems as though every game arrives with optimistic dynastic claims, but very few actually make it past the first generation. Apart from luck and that intangible factor called style, at least two elements are essential: a fictional environment fascinating enough for players to want to revisit it, and a serious effort at improving the product from one sequel to the next.

Perhaps the most consistently praised, analysed and imitated sequence of fantasy CRPGs has been the Ultima series. Designed by Richard Garriott and marketed by his own company, Origin Systems of New Hampshire, the games have a large and enthusiastic following; the sixth in the series was published earlier this year to near-universal critical acclaim.

It is instructive to note that despite the recent marked increase in Origin's commercial activities, **Ultima VI** still shows all the signs of its designer's personal commitment and involvement. By the same token, even the earliest games in the sequence can still be recommended to the enthusiast; in fact, **Ultimas I-III** have currently been reissued in a one-box set for the PC.

The first **Ultima** was little more than an early draft of its immediate successor, **Ultima II: Revenge of the Enchantress**. The plots of both were pretty basic: the land of Sosaria, ruled by the oddly-titled Lord British, is afflicted first by the foul wizard Mondain and, following his defeat, by his apprentice Minax. In both cases, a hero is called forth to Do the Right Thing and Cleanse the Land of Evil.

Lightning strikes VI

What made **Ultima II** stand out from the ruck of early fantasy CRPGs was a certain indefinable sense of style and, above all, the sheer size of the game, which ranged across great tracts of time and space. It remains largely a combat and exploration game, using bird's eye view maps across which a player icon is moved on its way to towns, villages and dungeons. Magic and transaction with non player characters are both rudimentary, but there are lots of fascinating extras to discover and use: time gates, ships, an aeroplane and a spaceship.

Ultima III: Exodus (1983) represented a major progression. It was the first game to establish both the physical and mythical parameters of Britannia, the universe in which this and all subsequent Ultimas are located, and into which the first two games were retrospectively shoehorned. The continuity of these parameters is clearly important to Garriott, since each sequel has been designed to slot neatly into place with a maximum of consistency. At the same time, every new game has introduced substantial improvements.

Exodus

Ultima III was also the first game to introduce multi-character parties. The player adventures with a party of four characters who are summoned to the aid of Sosaria in the usual cavalier fashion, this time to defeat the forces of evil which have been set free by Exodus, offspring of the late unlamented Mondain and Minax.

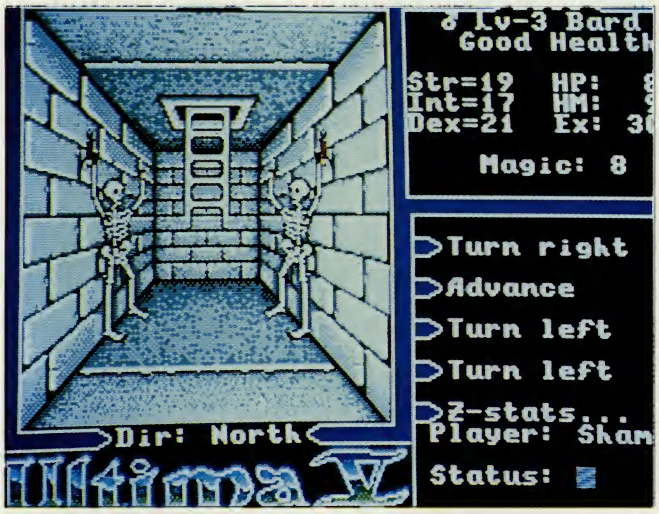
The characters are created at game start from a permutation of five races, eleven professions and no fewer than three sexes: male, female or 'other'. Lord British, who was mysteriously transported to Sosaria from modern Cambridge (!) at the start of the cycle,

The Ultima series was designed by Richard Garriott and his Origin Systems, and published by Mindscape

Ultimas I-III are available for the PC in a three-game set, price £29.99

Ultimas IV and V are available as individual games for the ST and Amiga (£29.99) and the PC (£34.99)

Ultima VI is only available on the PC at the time of writing, price £34.99



Skeletons in the Ultima V closet?

appears responsible for the terrible plague of pseudo-Elizabethan tushery which has broken across the land in a welter of ungrammatical thee's and thou's, but as he now rules the roost it's best not to giggle too loudly...

At this stage in its development, the Ultima universe consists of relatively sophisticated scrolling maps in two different scales for the 'wraparound' wilderness and for towns, and of some very primitive point-of-view graphics for the dungeons. A single figure stands in for the entire party when travelling, but during battle the map is replaced by an arena on which all four party members are shown.

Transaction is still rudimentary, with no player input, and magic consists of a small number of spells whose availability depends on a character's level and profession. On the other hand, the environment is beginning to flesh out nicely, with different shops and services in towns, varying winds, and an elegant system of teleportation via Moon Gates controlled by the phases of twin moons. Graphic quality on the original Apple II versions was pretty basic, but the later PC and ST implementations are good, if hardly state of the art.

Above all, **Exodus** demonstrated a rare ability to hold a player's attention for the long period of time necessary to complete the game. Since this almost invariably becomes a problem halfway through such games, as tasks degenerate into tedious makework and any suspension of disbelief goes by the board, it's worth looking at how Garriott deals with the problem.

It must be emphasised that by their very nature, all computer games have a linear design; that is to say, action [A] leads on to actions [B], [C] and eventually [Z] and the fulfilment of the appointed quest, whether this be killing the Necromancer or cornering the world monkey nut crop. Care is normally taken to ensure that a player cannot go from starting point [A] straight to culmination [Z], or else there will be a lot of very annoyed customers.

Furthermore, the program can only respond to actions not already programmed into it by ignoring them ('You cannot eat the Grand Duke!'). Where **Ultima** shows considerable cunning is in disguising the inherent linearity of its design.

In other words, though the game requires you to start at [A] and end at [Z], it may not care in what order you complete intermediate steps [B], [C] and [D]; if you get stuck finishing one task, you can always switch to another temporarily.

It also provides minor sub-quests whose completion are a source of satisfaction, while moving the entire plot forward. Note also that success in this area is not just a question of adding in more and more plot elements; getting the blend and balance right is just as crucial. A reliable way of telling how well a complex CRPG is designed is whether you bother to complete it, and a surprisingly large number of people make a point of finishing Ultima games. By way of contrast, the baroque ramifications of **Might & Magic** (New World Computing) tend to defeat all but the most obsessive of players.

Quest Of The Avatar

With **Ultima IV: Quest of the Avatar** (1985), Garriott made a brave, imaginative and only partly successful effort to break away from the standard CRPG formula of 'track down the chief baddy and kill him'. The game's basic premise is that following the defeat of the 'Triad of Evil' in **Ultimas I-III**, Sosaria underwent a series of physical and political upheavals which left Lord British in charge of the new Empire of Britannia, a land superficially at peace except for its wilder fringes. The player's role is that of a would-be Avatar, somebody who seeks to achieve a state of perfection through practice of the eight virtues. The virtues really do have to be practised, too; flee from combats once too often and your Courage suffers, steal and you are deemed deficient in Honesty...

It's not all milk-and-water, though, for the aspirant to Avatarhood must be prepared for long journeys, bloody battles in dungeons and mysterious islands, and, above all, very extensive research before things begin to make sense; as usual, the well-produced documentation paints in the background, but gives only the sketchiest of hints as to what awaits you.

The plot revolves around exploration, the accumulation of clues and artifacts, and some serious analysis of the rather mechanistic ethical system which is unfolded. It is best to think of this last as an abstract puzzle rather than allow oneself to become irritated by it, reeking as it does of sixties jargon and promoted by smug non player characters who come out with portentous comments along the lines of 'My being is based on my own truth, love and courage' ('Get me a bucket, Iolo, I think I'm going to be sick!').

However, as far as game mechanics are concerned, there are more and welcome innovations. While only one player character is created (the Avatar), up to seven other characters of different abilities must be recruited

Verily, decimal fractions maketh Ultima VI

Ultimas IV, V and VI form part of a series. The series will be continued in Ultima VII, which is in the process of being designed

V and VI support VGA and soundboards

into the party, and tracking them down is itself one of the many tasks. **Quest of the Avatar** also introduces an extensive transaction system based on the concept of key words – still, to my mind, the best yet devised. This depends upon approaching non player characters and initiating conversation by typing the words 'name' or 'job'. In responding ('My name is Durkheim, and I study transactional analysis'), the character may give further clues as which other key words it may react to, or else a previously discovered key word might be tried out; some characters have extensive conversations, and may even throw the ball back and question the player in turn.

Spell casting in the game depends on finding or buying a number of reagents and mixing them in the right combination.

Combat remains one of the weaker elements, particularly the ridiculous restriction which only allows attacks in the cardinal directions; on the other hand, it's now possible to flee from battle.

Geographically, the map of Britannia (reproduced as usual on a piece of acrylic cloth which British commentators invariably and irreverently refer to as a tea-towel) has settled down into the form which will keep for at least the next three games, give or take a few islands and a natural disaster or two.

Warriors Of Destiny

Ultima V: Warriors of Destiny (1988) extended the Avatar concept, but without the self-righteousness of its predecessor, and as a result proved a much better game.

The playerAvatar returns to Britannia to find Lord British missing, while the puritanical Lord Blackthorn has instigated a reign of terror with the help of the three Shadowlords. The search for the lost King leads across Britannia and into its many dungeons, through the vast, grim Underworld, and into the Ultimate Abyss.

Particularly impressive is the way detail has been worked into the background: lighthouses' beams sweep across the sea at night, clocks tick and tell the time, harpsichords can be played to produce a tune, carpets can be picked up. It must be said that at times the realism becomes a little oppressive, as for example when merchants close up shop for lunch.

In view of its overall sophistication and attention to detail, it comes as a disappointment to find that the game is once again let down by the combat system, which rapidly becomes a routine chore; in fact, the party's ability to wear invisibility rings in battle skews the odds badly in the middle and late games.

A potentially more serious design flaw involves the acquisition of a particular artifact before entering the final dungeon; if you haven't got it with you you're stuck, and by the time you find out you can't do anything about it. Despite these quibbles, **Ultima V** is a classic game which can be recommended to everyone but the most single-minded of hack-and-slash fans.

The False Prophet

And so to **Ultima VI: The False Prophet** (1990), the most talked-about CRPG of the year. The first Ultima to be launched on PC, finally forsaking the faithful old Apple II, **The False Prophet** represents the second (and greatest) progression in the series to date.

Graphically and conceptually, the game has moved several degrees closer to realism, and the results are stunning. Instead of the different scales of bird's-eye-view maps, the wire-frame dungeons and the flat character icons drifting across the map tiles, we are now offered a three-quarter overhead view of every member of the player's party as they march across Britannia – and it is a radically different Britannia, whose principal characteristic could now be described as 'seamlessness', since there are no longer any changes in scale between the wilderness and other sites.

It is hard to exaggerate the effect of this innovation. Where once a town icon had to be 'entered', thereby loading a discrete and separate town map, the player simply carries on walking down a road or path until houses and buildings start appearing at the edge of the screen; walk all the way through the town, and wilderness gradually takes over again at the other side.

Exactly the same applies to the interiors of buildings and in dungeons. Given the size of Britannia, this can at first result in total confusion and a kind of sensory overload. The answer is to study the map while travelling along a road from one town to another; with a little trial and error, a sense of scale will suddenly snap into place.

Also contributing to the sensory overload is the sheer graphic richness, from rabbits in the undergrowth to mice in cellars and a huge variety of objects in the towns. All the items can be picked up and manipulated, and while most are there simply for show, others can be used to good effect: legs of lamb can be consumed, powder kegs will blow up doors or enemies, and even ornamental swords will cause some damage in combat. Astonishingly, every single intelligent non player character comes with a unique portrait which appears during transaction.

Ultima VI's unique sense of seamlessness extends to combat, which no longer takes place in a separate 'arena'; instead, combat can flare up anywhere, continue right across the map, and end in any number of ways, whether in victory, flight or just confusion!

At the same time (and this again is a giant step forward), combat does not occur just anyplace, but only in locations where one would normally expect to run into enemies.

Finally, a quick word about plot structure, which promises to develop into the deepest, most complex and perhaps even ambiguous of the entire series. The player (and by now veteran Avatar) is jerked back to Britannia once more to deal with a plague of gargoyles; but the summoning is strange, and Lord British himself seems oddly unworried by the fact that the Shrines of Virtue are being taken over one after the other. Is everything as straightforward as it seems? Only time (lots of it!) will tell.

The False Prophet gives every sign of being a worthy addition to its distinguished pedigree, but it raises an interesting design consideration: is it possible to take realism too far in a CRPG? By this I mean that a game in which a player character was required, as a matter of routine, to shoot game, skin and clean it, gather firewood, start a fire and roast the catch as an alternative to merely buying 'food' from a shop or pub would be an unplayable monster.

Ultima VI is, of course, nowhere near this point, but it does include an awful lot of business which, while delightful at first, may perhaps prove tedious in the long run; certainly it seems to have taken environmental design as far as it is possible to go. It would appear that Richard Garriott has designed the ultimate Ultima – until, that is, **Ultima VII** rolls around, about two years from now... SP

Ultima I

Ultima II: Revenge of the Enchantress

Ultima III: Exodus

Ultima IV Quest of the Avatar

Ultima V Warriors of Destiny

Ultima VI The False Prophet

CLUED UP

by Professor Plum

ARTHUR

At some point in the game you'll come across a cold room. You'll know when, because this room is very cold – so cold it will freeze the very words from your mouth. Now then, there is also a hot room which is soooo hot it'll dry your tongue and throat – if you can just say the magic word to open the door you'll be on your way.

If you're being bothered by an invisible knight pay a visit to the ivory tower. Pity you haven't got a key. Shame, if only you could joust could think of a way in.

BARD'S TALE 3

Inside the Ice Keep you'll find a slab on the floor which can only be opened by possessing three lenses. The lenses can be found in the three towers, each blocked by powerful magic wards which must be dispelled.

Check out the diary in the hut. Apart from giving you a thorough lowdown on Skara Brae's bank holidays and when Tarjan, the Mad God, has his official birthday, it'll also give you a few hints on how to dispel the wards. The inscriptions on the walls next to the walls are also hints. Obscure, but hints all the same.

CURSE OF AZURE BONDS

Probably the best order for removing the bonds is Tilverton (fire knives), Yulash (moander), Haptooth (dracanros), Zhentil Keep (Fzoul/ Beholder) and Myth Drandor (Tyranthraxus).

In Tilverton search the Thieves Guild before nipping into the sewers. Similarly for the Fire Knives hideout. In the Red Tower you don't have to fight the dragons. Be nice to them – all they get is hassle: everyone needs a little love sometime.

Visit the elven queen in Myth Drandor. She's in the crypt (don't ask). Keep an eye out for Rakshasa – the vagrant is in disguise.

Buy a couple of magic missile wands from Zhentil Keep then enter Yulash – avoid encounters initially, but fight the shambling mounds by the cleric's body.

DRAKKHEN

If your team face a rather large and nasty monster and you get the collywobbles – just press the return key. You will automatically do a half-turn. You can then run like the clappers in the opposite direction!

GOLD RUSH

Can't find the gold mine? Have you been to the outhouse (after following the mule from Fort Sutter)? Enter it and light your lantern. There should be a hole there somewhere. Nip in, move SW until you reach a large door. Once past the door climb down the ladder and... one mine. To find your brother (at the end of the game) climb back up the mine shaft to the right and above the large black rock to the left. Go left to the next ladder and down. Follow the shaft down and west until big bro appears.

HEROES OF THE LANCE

Keep the mage and Goldmoon in the front line, so that they can do their stuff. A few tips on how to attack the following: Baaz Draconians – there should be no real problem; Giant Spiders – swing your sword downward to them; Trolls – 'charm' or 'hold' then hit them; Gully Dwarves – easy meat; Wraiths – charm and hit them quickly; Hatchling Black Dragons – use the 'Deflect Dragon Breath' and then hit their legs and lower body.

HERO'S QUEST I

There is no way inside the Goblin's cave, chaps, so don't waste your energy. Fighting Goblins is only useful to increase your attributes. Similarly, there is no way into the front of the Brigand Fortress – ah, but there is a back way. The Wizard is only a source of info, unless you're a mage. Unless you're a thief forget locked doors. You can also forget the Troll, too, unless you fancy a bit of treasure. Careful, though, he's a tough cookie.

Avoid the graveyard at night. But then there's a fairy dust problem. In that case night time is a good time. When you meet up with the baron's son all you will need is kindness and a key. Mosey on down to the tavern afterwards. As for Antwerp, just walk carefully and there'll be no probs. Antwerp is a little weird but not likely to bite your leg off. Unlike the equally weird dog next door which often does.

KINGS QUEST IV

How to catch a unicorn: first do an impression of the Biblical Prophet Jonah, by going for a swim out to sea, but make sure that you have a feather with you. After a ticklish time you'll end up back on terra firma. Search a wrecked boat carefully, and you'll find a bridle – now that could be handy!

How to dig a cemetery: look up the miser, the baby, Betty, the Lord, and Willy.

A key point: after you play the organ, check out a drawer. Beware of the dog? Bone up on how to deal with it.

LEISURE SUIT LARRY II

If actually starting this game is the main problem then remember that honesty is not always the best policy. Incidently, for the more experienced players out there, the spinach dip is for points only.

PLUNDERED HEARTS

Don't forget to go the Ball before you troop off to find Daddy. Once you've done that check out the library. You know – where they always keep the hidden doors, secret passages and the like. Handle things freely and try to overcome your strict upbringing and you should uncover the passage.

POLICE QUEST 2

Don't forget to visit the shooting range to adjust Sonny's sights. His gun will be far more accurate. Dust everything for fingerprints at the scene of a crime. Call for backup, wave your hand-gun in their faces and identify yourself as a police officer during felony arrests – it's the proper procedure. Always re-question witnesses, you may obtain info the second time around.

Terrorist bomb? If you want to get ahead, get a hat. In the sewers: better find a way to mask the nasty niff!

STARFLIGHT 2

Forget the Class 1 armaments (absolute waste of time and space), nip over to system class M next to Starport and the class M system at the top of the Wee Dipper for some quick cash.

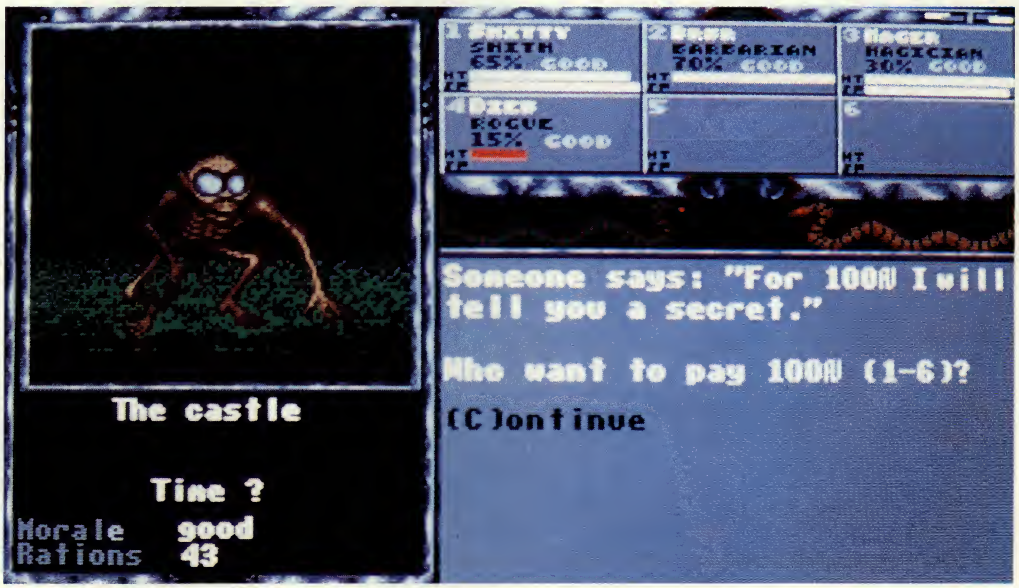
TANGLED TALES

In the final scenario, buy everything you can – leave the cookie. Keep an eye open for rabbit traps too. There are three of the blighters. Once each character has joined your party at this time make sure you have a quick chat with them. As for the horrible Devourer, don't bother laying on the GBH as the guy is tough. In fact don't start to fight this unseemly character as you'll never get out alive. Flip through the spell book instead, something may be of use. SP

LEGEND OF FAERGHAIL

Language Maketh Man

by Colin Harvey



IN **LEGEND of Faerghail** you are a warrior who must free the elves. It seems that these normally peaceful folk have turned violent.

The game appears on three disks and comes with a manual filled with 95 English pages. Set within a medieval atmosphere, you wander around the game-world using a first-person perspective. There are eight dungeon sectors, each with at least four levels that contain around 1200 rooms.

Creating your characters is a refreshing exercise. For example, female characters are recognised as stand-alone figures, they have higher wisdom than males and a higher constitution. In addition born intelligence cannot be changed. Good point this, and a very obvious one ignored by many other companies.

Magic is handled well in that you have a daily quota of hit points – reflecting oncoming weariness, no doubt. Characters have distinctive skills – elves make good archers, for example. Different alignments (good, bad, lawful and so on) are offered too. The well written manual displays a nice vein of humour and descriptive character summaries.

Some of the more novel aspects of **Legend** consist of: Careers including the Blacksmith (a 'walking workshop'), Illusionist, Monk and Healer (female-only, incidentally) as well as one or two interesting skill abilities such as picking pockets, negotiating and stalking.

Talk Like An Orc

However, it is the range of eight languages available – from Animal to Orc languages that sets **Legend** apart from the majority of other RPGs. Those proficient in a certain language can obtain information, trade, prevent conflict or encourage a monster to change sides and fight for your party! Language proficiency can be increased via training but this is a hit and miss affair, as other factors such as the level of concentration are taken into consideration – another sensible design implementation.

Going Underground

Down in the dungeons, the good features continue. For example if a character fails to pick a lock, another character can break the door with physical force but, and here's the good bit, is liable to get injured. Makes sense, doesn't it? As does the fact that weapons and armour can be damaged in combat – although the blacksmith can repair them. During dungeon combat you can lure monsters away from you if you wish to retreat, by leaving bait.

It is interesting to see that automapping is not a 'free gift'; you have to work to find the magic ball before you see it. This option is increasingly being initialised at the outset by many RPGs and, therefore, expected from the outset by players so it was a brave decision by Reline to stick to its design principles. Fine by me, I just see it as more evidence that Reline hasn't tried to produce a 'safe' product.

When you engage in combat you'll see a three line attack formation within a small window on-screen. The further forward the character is the more damage it does, but the more prone to attack it is too. The rear line is handy for spell-casters to concentrate on offensive/defensive spells (1 meg Amigas display a mini-animated sequence of each individual character skirmish). It is good to see that you can back away from all encounters if you wish – useful because they appear frequently. This prevents Legend falling into the staid hack'n'slash class of RPG.

Graphics and sound are good but it is the way they are implemented that makes the difference. The whole presentation is more atmospheric and varied than your usual RPG.

While sticking to many standard RPG conventions **Legend** still manages to introduce a few unique features all of its own. Displaying numerous facets of intelligent and sensible design, **Legend of Faerghail** is heartily recommended. A pat on the back to Reline for thinking before coding. SP

Designed by
Olaf Barthal, Veith Schorgenhummer & Mathias Kastner

Published by
Rainbow Arts/Soft Gold

Price £29.99

Available for PC, Amiga & ST
Reviewed on PC

CGA, EGA

AdLib and Tandy sound

COVERT ACTION

Ollie North Rides Again

by Brian Walker

ALTHOUGH appearing in the 'adventure' section of this magazine, **Covert Action** is not an adventure game in the sense generally understood by adventure gamers. Rather it is a curious, though effective, hybrid of deduction and puzzle solving. The star of the show is Max (or Maxine) Remington who was something of a maverick CIA agent before, in a fine display of Reaganomics, going private.

Like Dirty Harry before him, Max's employees did not entirely approve of his methods and who can blame them? Freed of compliance to laws made by liberal pussies, Max has a *carte blanche* to eliminate *some of the most evil men in the world*. This means not only denying them the 'oxygen of publicity', but denying them any oxygen at all!

Bondage

There are four basic skills required in the game: combat, driving, cryptography, and electronics. Training is available in all categories. By selecting to improve on one of these, the difficulty factor of any scenario calling for the use of that skill will be reduced. Driving skills are needed to tail suspects.

The implementation of this sequence is very imaginative: the screen is split into three with half of it being taking up by what looks like a maze containing several cul-de-sacs. The object is, of course, to avoid these while staying with the perp. This is but one of several sub-games conspiring to form a whole. This approach can often result in a game being neither fish nor fowl, yet here, in the convoluted world of secret agents, it works perfectly.

Another sub-game, and one that should appeal to puzzle solvers and cryptologists, is the code breaking sequence. Here you are given one or two letters which are 'known' (ie you are told which letters they are represented by in the encoded message). You are also told how many of each letter appears in the message. From these clues you are expected to crack it.

In a way that complements these sub-games quite neatly, the criminals operate in a manner that is both cell-like and hierarchical – another series of puzzles. The small fry should be seen as mere stepping stones to the 'masterminds', as the manual dubs them. This interlinking structure is also reflected in the way crimes are handled by the game system: crimes do not stand alone, they are always part of a greater plot. By stopping *enough* of these crimes, though, you could foil the master plan.

Arresting perps willy nilly won't do the trick, however. Perps have rights too. You must actually *prove* they are perps. Successful interrogation will depend on knowledge already gleaned, meaning the perp is not going to say anything about a meeting which he knows you know nothing about. You'll be provided with clues at the outset of the game, the number of which will depend on the difficulty level chosen.

During the course of the game you can view files containing details of suspects, review personnel files of criminal organisations you have uncovered, tune in to news bulletins, and much more besides. In other words, the level of detail throughout the game is extremely high. All these are accessed via a series of menus and sub-menus that are easy to use and nice to look at.

The ultimate objective is the arrest of all 26 masterminds, though you'll probably find yourself settling for a lot less in the years to come. Your performance is measured in 'efficiency points', which in turn reflect the sort of holiday you are about to be given. This can vary from two weeks in a laundromat to a month in Monte Carlo.

Right Off

Covert Action is a very big game and one that invites no comparison. There are action sequences but these are easy to master. The primary skills needed are of a deductive nature. The most impressive aspect is the interlocking structure of the game and level of detail. The latter should come as no surprise to those who have played **Railroad Tycoon** – the last game designed by this team. **Covert Action** in addition to being very big is also very tough, though the manual is on your side. Weighing in at 96 pages this tome provides a comprehensive guide that 'M' would have been proud of. The graphics are double top and enhance play rather than being flashy for the sake of it.

My only reservations about the game concern the rather dubious morality: in particular the use of recognisable names and the descriptions thereof. You don't have to be a rabid Marxist to feel that the FLN guerrillas in El Salvador are the good guys in that dispute, yet here they are portrayed as murderous thugs. This is not only unpleasant but also (if you agree with this view) detracts somewhat from identifying with the central character – whose task it is, of course, to terminate them with extreme prejudice. Games portray fantasies which should be able to be enjoyed by all, not just those who share what appear to be the political prejudices of the design team. Amen. SP

Designed by
Sid Meier and Bruce Shelley

Published by
Microprose

Price £34.99

Available on the PC
Other versions to follow later this year

VGA EGA CGA

Roland and AdLib soundboards supported

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

Lucasfilms Go Ape

by Brian Walker

IN GEORGE Lucas's second film, *American Graffiti*, one of the car number plates read 'THX 1138' which, would you believe, was the title of his first film. A nice tongue-in-cheek joke that was 'in' without being cliquey. Even though George himself was not involved in the making, a similar sort of humour pervades **The Secret of Monkey Island**. Like the pirate, for example who wears a sign saying: 'Ask me about **Loom**'. And sure enough if you do, he'll tell you all about it!

Yo! Guybrush

Before you can reach Monkey Island though, you must first negotiate Mêlée Island. This is something of training ground for budding pirates, as you will have to undergo The Three Trials which are set by the pirate chiefs.

One of your main objectives here is to acquire some cash (hint: hold on to your hat). Swashbuckling skills are also required, but mercifully arcade skills are not. The toughest trial of all, though, is living with your given name of Guybrush Threepwood. If you pass the tests, it's on to the eponymous island where a number of strange events have even the bravest pirates running scared. From this point in the game, you're on your own.

Monkey Island is a tough nut to crack – far tougher than the aforementioned **Loom**, though still encompassing much of that game's adventure philosophy (ie if you make a mistake you will not 'die'). As Sierra has discovered, the last thing people want to do when they get home from work, apart from dying, is to start typing – especially in what is supposed to be a fun medium. Hence both Sierra and Lucasfilm are keen to stress the point-and-click interface – a device which suits their products, where storytelling, rather than the search for whimsical synonyms, is considered paramount.

Rub-A-Dub

The playing time is estimated at thirty hours, and Long John Walker can well believe it. Most of this time will be spent puzzle solving rather than the more tedious task of mapping. 'Charm' is a word that is becoming synonymous with Lucasfilm games, and **Monkey Island** has in it abundance. The graphics resemble the Disney-like animation that was so captivating in **Loom**. The box blurb promises 'gut crunching reggae music'. What you get is a lilting rhythm that owes more to Boney M than Bob Marley. But this is no gripe. It suits the light mood of the game perfectly.

For those who measure value for money by the number of disks that come with a game, I can tell you that **The Secret of Monkey Island** arrives with a complement ofeight. Roll on CD-ROM. SP

Designed by
Ron Gilbert

Published by
Lucasfilms

Price £29.99 (PC)
£24.99 (others)

Available for the PC Amiga and ST versions due in February

CGA, EGA, VGA

AdLib/SoundBlaster, Gameblaster soundboards supported
Roland owners require a separate data disk available from Lucasfilms

Joystick, mouse (optimal) or Keyboard interface

HOW TO BE A GOOD MONKEY: HINTS AND TIPS

- So you've got off Mêlée Island. Clever you. But how to get on to Monkey Island, especially if the crew are coming over all cranky? Remember your days at the circus? Maybe it's time to make a comeback.
- You *must* try to escape the Saddam Hussein style 'guest hut'. Once you've got out, head for the clearing and your monkey mate should help you.
- Remember! Monkeys like bananas. Offer them five and they'll do anything. If you need more bananas go North young man.
- Monkey's heads look kind of cute, but there's not much inside them. So don't go mapping them. Instead I'm afraid it's back to the cannibal village, but you may need a guide. Or maybe just *part* of a guide.
- Unless you want to end up as a tropical entrée, you'd better offer a trade to the would-be diners (ie the cannibals). However, in all probability you won't have what they want. Yet. In this instance a monkey is a man's best friend. Just go where he/she goes, and you could find something that will appeal to your 'hosts'.

Intuitive interface: Kings Quest V (left). 'Unlike any adventure game you've seen': Rise of the Dragon (right).

Sierra drought over

Following the opening of its UK office, Sierra On-Line has announced a whole batch of releases. **Rise of the Dragon** is described as a 'totally new type of interactive game' which combines animation, interaction, puzzle-solving, and cinematic storytelling techniques. Sierra promises this will be 'unlike any adventure game you've ever seen'.

Like all the new Sierra adventures, **Rise of the Dragon** features a point and click interface and has an RRP of £39.99.

Red Baron is one of a number of First World War aerial combat games currently on release. Features include 256 colour VGA graphics, random mission generation, a choice of 15 aircraft, detailed worlds including the German-French front, Paris and London. **Red Baron** was designed by Dynamix software which Sierra recently took over. RRP £39.99.

Kings Quest I has been revamped and released in 256 colour VGA with a new soundtrack. **Kings Quest V** is the latest release in this popular series and features no less than 10 meg of game data. Sierra's new intuitive interface makes this suitable for novices and experienced adventurers.

Jones in the Fast Lane is a multiplayer (1-4) parody of a boardgame. The object is to keep one step ahead (in the material world) of your neighbours/opponents.

Space Quest IV welcomes back Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers. On his way back home, Roger bumps into the Sequel Police – an intergalactic team of adventure poopers. To avoid these Blue Meanies, Roger very sensibly enlists the help of the Latex Babes of Chronos *(who wouldn't? – Ed)*. All these games will be available on the PC with Amiga versions to follow next year.

BITS

Top Microprose programmer Sid Meier is working on an as yet untitled evolution game. He also has plans for a role-playing game that is said to be different from anything released thus far in the genre.

Midwinter 2, due for release in spring, will be subtitled Flames of Freedom, referring to the allegorical nature of the game, which mirrors events in Eastern Europe.

Lost your licence? Now you can drive a sports car in total safety – on tracks designed by the designer or yourself – with 4D Sports Driving from Mindscape and DSI, the creators of Test Drive.

One or two in the dragon's eye

Does anybody remember **Shanghai**, Activision's 'classic award winning Oriental strategy game'? No? Never mind, now you can catch up with **Shanghai II: Dragon's Eye**.

This follow-up is reported to retain the strategy of the original while adding new tile layouts, animation, and enhanced sound.

Activision claims the game is a 'distant relative' of Mah Jong, the object being to match up pairs of tiles until none are left *(sounds more like Taipei – Ed)*. Once you have mastered **Shanghai II**, you can then go on to play **Dragon's Eye** – a game of placing and blocking tiles against the computer.

Cruises can be murder

Ever fancied yourself as a Poirot or a Marple? If so, you're invited on a cruise, but there's one small problem: your host has an extremely short life expectancy...

Following the success of **Operation Stealth**, US Gold has announced the release of **Cruise for a Corpse**, the latest game to employ Cinématique's point-and-click interface.

Expect this user-friendly sleuthery to be in the shops around February.

Overlord seeks to liberate Europe

Australia's SSG releases **Overlord** on the PC at the end of this year. It's a grand strategic game of the liberation of Europe, starting with the D-Day landings in Normandy, and continuing until the defeat of Germany.

There are three theatres of war – Europe, Italy and the Russian Front – all of which are active.

Russian units start appearing on the eastern edge of the map not long after the game has started. **Overlord** has a Macintosh-style mouse interface, with pull down menus and dialogue boxes, just like the real thing.

It can also be easily controlled from the keyboard.

A strategic screen shows the entire map in one go, complete with units.

Overlord should be available on the PC in December.

Battleset scenario – the official version revealed

For those of you confused about the current status of **Harpoon**, here's the latest bulletin: Mirrorsoft is currently selling version 1.1. This will *not* run with the Scenario Editor or any of the Battlesets currently being sold on import.

Mirrorsoft says it has no plans to release any of the Battlesets in the UK for the PC, at least.

As far as the Amiga version goes, it transpires that originally *two* drives would have been needed to run the game on the Commodore machine.

This version was scrapped in favour of a model that will be able to run on a 1 meg Amiga using a single drive. A January release date is expected.

Mirrorsoft could not confirm whether Battlesets for the Amiga version would be released in the UK.

The company's eventual decision is likely to depend on sales of the full game.

All clear? Mirrorsoft explains what's happening with Harpoon.

SSI negotiates AD&D licences

Most SSI's range of AD&D games will be released for the ST in December. **Curse of the Azure Bonds** will be shipped in the second week of the month while **Champions of Krynn** should come out along with the reindeers.

Perhaps there is some strange religious sub-text in these games for the next release will be **Pools of Radiance** – at Easter!

In a new development, SSI has agreed to a series of sub-licenses for the AD&D games.

The first of these games is currently being programmed in the UK and has a working title of **Shadow Sorcerer**.

The second release is expected to be **Curse of the Black Sun** which is undergoing development in Germany.

Both games will use a radically different engine to anything seen thus far, and it is said they will bring an entirely new perspective to the AD&D genre.

Like other SSI products, this new range will be distributed in the UK by US Gold.

Youngblood plans his revenge on Infocom

Famous text adventurer Infocom has produced the latest in the **Battletech** series: **Battletech II**.

Sub-titled *The Crescent Hawk's Revenge*, **Battletech II** takes up where *The Crescent Hawk* left off in the first of the series.

Jason Youngblood (naff name) searches for his father who was kidnapped in the first game.

There's lots of combat action as well as adventure, all of which takes place in full 256-colour VGA and gut-crunching sound.

Take off in a Tomcat

F-16, F-19, now you can F off in **F-14 Tomcat**, the *only* F-14 flight simulator for the PC.

This simulator is described as 'simple enough' for beginners to fly, yet 'deep enough' to satisfy expert flyers.

Through superior flying in air-to-air combat manoeuvres, players earn the right to attend the 'Top Gun' Naval Fighter Weapons School and tell Tom Cruise what an awful movie *Days of Thunder* was.

Cartels face the chopper

Microprose has announced the follow-up to its best selling strategy simulation **Gunship**. Called **Gunship 2000**, the new game will feature an upgraded helicopter.

In keeping with current trend, the former 'evil empire' has now been replaced as America's enemy number one by the evil drug cartels of South America.

BITS

Might and Magic III is almost finished, according to the programming team at New World computing. This new game takes the form of a space opera.

Lucasfilm's Secrets of the Luftwaffe has been secretly delayed until February. Don't tell anyone we told you.

Several of top boardgame company Games Workshop's designers have left to join Microprose. Their forte at GW was the design of skirmish-level tabletop wargames, though it remains to be seen just how the 'home of sims' will harness their talents.

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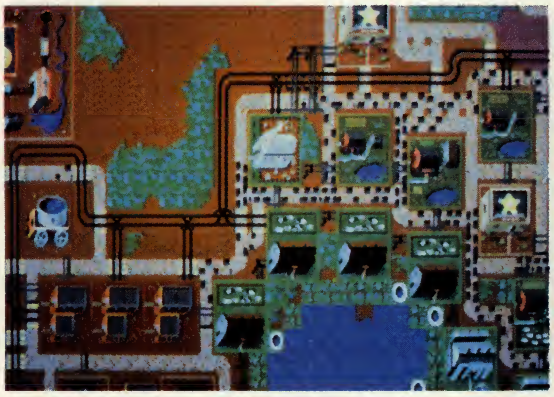
SIM ARCHITECT

Brian Walker finds sim thing new is happening at Infogrames



Man, myth and marshal: Ancient Asia (left) meets the Wild West (far left) in Sim Architecture 1.

Infogrames is releasing a series of expansion kits for its classic game **Sim City**. The first in the series is **Sim Architecture 1**, which contains three scenarios: *Ancient Asia*, *Medieval Times* and *Wild West*.

Ancient Asia allows you to create a mythical mixture of ancient Asian cultures and proclaim yourself Shogun. As such you will have to defend yourself against earthquakes, typhoons, tsunamis, and Chinese dragons (!).

In *Medieval Times* you are the king or queen of a marvellous castle that was built on the sweat of your serfs and the poll tax. It's not quite clear what the objective is here, though dragons (yawn) make an appearance.

Wild West sounds like more fun. It is the year 1849. You are headed out West to find gold and lurve on the range, but you discover only dragons. Sorry, we've got that wrong. Let's try again. You build a town, democratically elect yourself mayor, provost and marshal, and try to avoid the rattlesnakes (instead of the dragons). Life in the Far West is not all beans over a campfire: barns go up in flames, balloons crash (?) and someone contaminates your water supply. Why those ornery critters...!

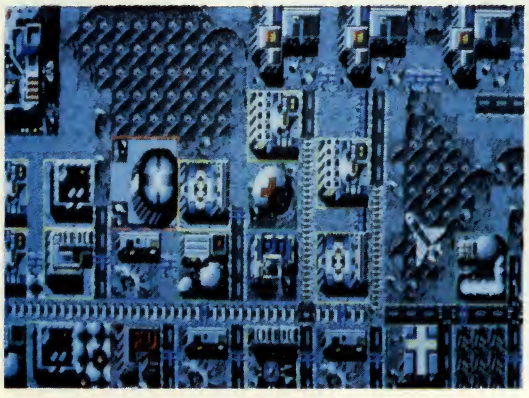
Sim Architecture 2 contains three futuristic scenarios, so there's no room for dragons. The first is *Future USA* in about the 21st century. Tired of living in an overcrowded Gigalopolis *(yes – Ed)?* Then why not start your own city, limit its growth, and keep it down to a mere megalopolis? Your high-tech system will incite envy in the solar system and Milton Keynes. Construct a spaceport, take interplanetary flights – 'so long you'll never be *able* to get off' – build nuclear fission plants and blow up the universe in full VGA.

Future Europe on the other hand is full of individual nations cherishing their cultural heritage and the ERM. All Europe is financially and politically united under an extension of the EC. More plausibly, there is controversy about the location of the capital of this new order (the French are kicking up a ruck as usual). This city will be the birthplace of the New European Culture and you have been chosen to design, build and manage it. Unfortunately you will have to deal with accidents, bio-hazard contamination and cranky cab drivers.

If that all sounds a bit much then why not drop by the moon and start up a colony? This is the scenario posited by *Moon Colony*, where you plan where no man has planned before. Trek on to discover mining riches and low gravity, all of which means that the moon is an ideal place to start a production colony and have a few house parties (no killjoy laws here).

Life's a breeze, so to speak, on the moon. It's a shame, though, about the minor irritants such as the lack of oxygen (!), alien monsters (dragons?), meteor showers, viral plagues, and acidic fungal moulds (believed to be a reference to Rolf Harris). To make up for these discomforts you can go to the recreation and sports complex (designed by Perky Pat Layouts?) and participate in low gravity Earth sports such as Sumo wrestling. As for holidays, how about spending two weeks in the Balneal Del Mar Moon Centre, where lager and Union Jack shorts are *de rigeur*?

Priced at £19.99 each, ownership of **Sim City** and a fertile imagination is necessary in order to play these games. SP



Moon madness strikes in Sim Architecture 2, where life as we know it is probably dragons.

Sim Architecture 1: Ancient Asia, Medieval Times and Wild West

Sim Architecture 2: Future USA, Future Europe and Moon Colony

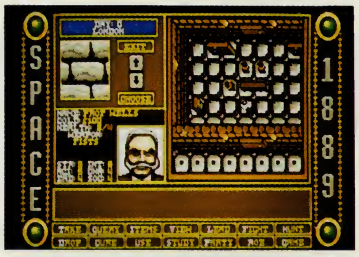
Designed by Maxis Software

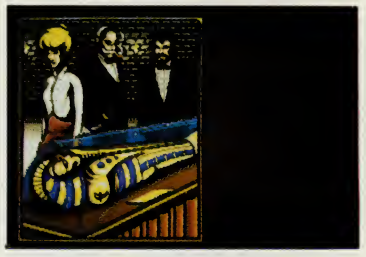
Published by Infogrames

Available on the PC, Amiga and ST to follow

Ownership of Sim City is necessary

SPACE 1889





Canal holidays will never be the same again after Space 1889.

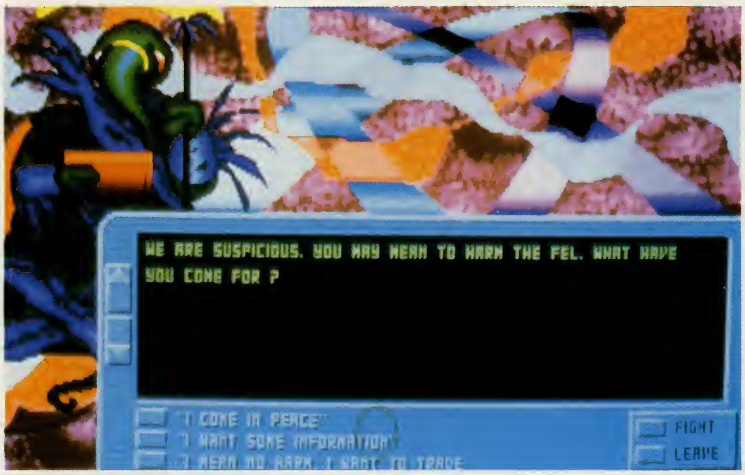
About to be released by Paragon in the US, **Space 1889** is a role-playing game based on the popular game by Game Designers' Workshop. **Space 1889** recreates the solar system as envisioned by the scientific theories of the 19th century and in the imaginations of Jules Verne, HG Wells and so on.

It is possible to visit the canals of Mars and deal with waring Martians, sail modified sailing ships through the space ether, travel through the undeground caverns of the Moon. Encounter corrupt German conspirators and find the lost city of Atlantis – and, no doubt, make it home in time for tea!

Features include five character parties with six attributes and 24 skills, including Fisticuffs, Theatrics and Engineering. You can control each character's development through their chosen career.

There are over 100 locations on Earth alone, 500 NPCs – each with their own personalities – and historic 19th century weapons including 30 guns, nine close combat weapons and four throwing weapons.

LIGHTSPEED


WE ARE SUSPICIOUS. YOU MAY MEAN TO HARM THE FEL. WHAT HAVE YOU COME FOR ?
1 COME IN PEACE
2 WANT SOME INFORMATION
3 MEAN NO HARM I WANT TO TRADE
FIGHT
LEAVE

We come in peace – shoot to kill: Lightspeed.

'The Earth is an ecological wasteland. Nuclear meltdowns, climate alternation, species extinction, have all taken their toll.' The human species has left Earth and your mission is to save *homo sapiens*'.

This is the background to Microprose's **Lightspeed**. As the pilot of a trailblazer series dreadnought, your job is to survey planets that may be suitable for human habitation. This involves having conversations with aliens and, in some cases, blowing them away.

If you do find a suitable planet you must mine the resources if you are to survive. There is also a strong economic/trading aspect to the game. The graphics and level of detail in the game are superb, but Microprose fans may be a bit put off by the arcade style combat sequences. It's all been done before, but seldom as well.

HARD NOVA

Hard Nova, from Electronic Arts, is yet another game set in the ever popular 'deep space'. The eponymous Nova is a mercenary, not a star, in fact she's a star *killer*.

Her habitat is the remote frontier known as the Triangulum Galaxy. Unfortunately an 'accident' has robbed her of her last crew leaving her to recruit a new bunch. Therein lies a story.

Nova, who sounds like a real ball-breaker, flies around the galaxy having threatening conversations with all and sundry, while at the same time participating in auctions in an attempt to get the best crew.

Combat includes Nova being involved in real-time hovership dogfights (catfights?).

All in all it's an interesting game which should appeal to fans of the **Star Flight** series.

Not even a motley crew: Hard Nova.

Yuppie nightmare becomes reality in Jones in the Fast Lane.

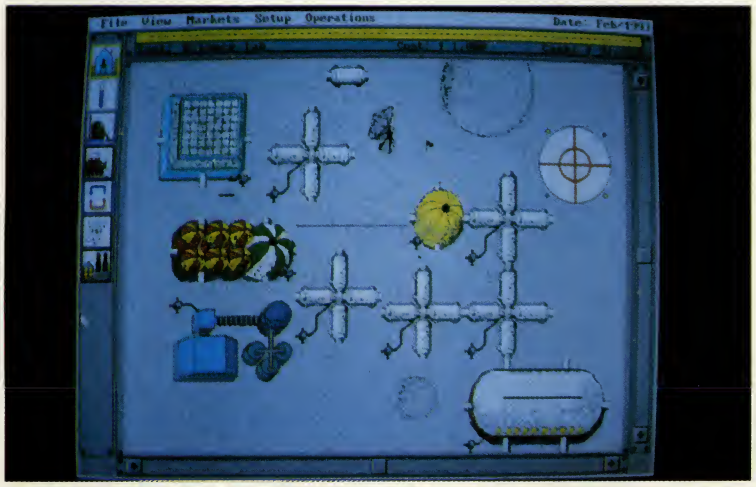
JONES IN THE FAST LANE

The first non-adventure game from Sierra On-Line turns out to be a sort of *homage* to the boardgames of the 1950s.

Like most in that genre, **Jones in the Fast Lane** is a multi-player game wherein the objective is to be the first to player realise their own pre-defined goals.

Our first reaction upon hearing this was to shout: 'Aargh! Yuppie nightmare.'

Not all the goals, however, turned out to be material, *and* **Jones in the Fast Lane** shows a wry sense of humour as it parodies all the people that you're supposed to be keeping up with.



Crumbs of comfort for would-be Sim City sim Moonbase.

MOONBASE

Everything you wanted to know about the moon but were afraid to ask appears to be included in **Moonbase**, a **Sim City** sim from Wesson/Mindscape. There's even a lunar stock market!

This game looks to be more of a 'hands on' operation than Maxi's classic, especially on the economic side.

The objective of the game is to build a self-sufficient moonbase, not dependent on NASA's measly crumbs..

LINKS

Yes, it's another golf game, but this one from Access/US Gold has got one of the best front-end's we've ever seen.

There's also some great graphics and sound. But is **Links** capable of putting (sorry) **PGA Golf** one over par? You'll be able to find out in our next issue.

Driving force: Access and US Gold's Links.

PLUMBING THE DEPTHS

with the designers of Microprose's Silent Service II

*This is an edited transcript from an on-line Compuserve conference with **Arnold Hendrick** and **Roy Gibson**. The Conference was held on September 20, 1990. The questioners are **Stuart Moulder** (SM), who hosted the conference, **Ron Hegel** (RH), and **'Capt Lotus'** (CL).*

*SM: I hear there is a new **Silent Service II** Version 2 file. What has been changed/enhanced from the current release?'*

RG: We've fixed some of the minor bugs, plus there's now a slow down key, and a 'scope 180° key. Hopefully there are no more nasty bugs left.

SM: I assume the slow down key means that you now support true 1:1 time compression?

RG: That's right – after some complaints we decided to make some changes. The speed is only a factor on 386/20 and faster. I feel 2:1 speed is actually realistic. The version released to Compuserve today will not be generally available in the box until we finish getting feedback from this version.

CL: How does one get the NUC, PUC, and CMOH ratings? Do sub type and play levels enter into it?

AH: Both are a factor. You get the highest score for using the old 'S' class and the highest difficulty. The value of the target depends on the number of escorts, the more escorts the higher the value.

CL: I understand about escorts, but what do you have to score for CMOH? There appears to be more than simple scores to the citations.

AH: Yes, the CMOH require a huge score. (I don't have my game files here with me, but I can tell you citations require a high average over many patrols).

*RH: I have encountered a slight problem/bug with **SSII**. I have **SSII** on my hard drive at work (don't ask) and I have a problem in that when I am logged in the network (Novell) the ID security screen at the beginning doesn't show a ship picture. This problem only occurs when I reboot and not log-in.*

AH: Look on pages 4 & 5 of the technical supplement. You have basically run out of memory. You need up to 580K or so to get all the ship pictures.

RH: Yes... Page 5. ...insufficient memory... 'invisible ships'... But I have 4 Meg of RAM!

AH: I'm talking about conventional memory, of which you only have 640K.

*RH: As long as we're talking hardware, does **SSII** adjust for clock speed? Or am I actually at a disadvantage on 25 MHz?*

AH: No, you are not. Our tests indicate that the game on a 486/20 runs about as fast as a 486/25. The limiting factor seems to be the speed of your graphics card, however, the minimum machine we recommend is a turbo 8088, and that is pretty sloooow.

RG: Okay, the game peaks at an upper speed of 2:1 if your hardware can manage that – however some people found this too fast hence the addition of the 's' key.

CL: I prefer 'game' simulations to 'simulation' games, but, why are the durned Japanese depth charges so deadly? That is not historical: they were set to explode above 250 feet for a long time, maybe even the whole war. Why did you not let the

C ontinued page 40

Silent Service II is published by Microprose, price £34.99

A review of the game appeared in our last issue

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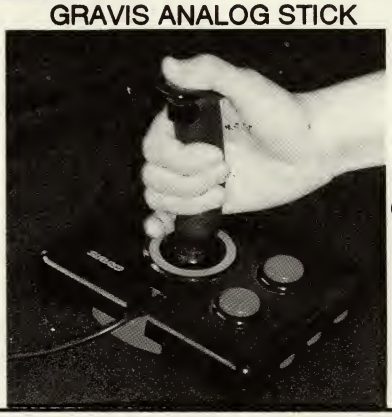

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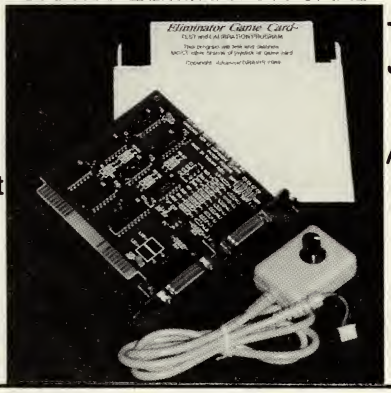

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5¼", 3½"and dual versions available for PC version

Plumbing The Depths, continued from page 38

playerincursystemsdamage forcing a return to port, but allow survivability and throw in a repair time penalty?

AH: Firstly, the depth charges in the game do much *more* damage than they did in reality. That's for playability. At higher difficulty levels they are much more realistic. You are correct about the depth settings, but the Japs eventually caught on. If we limited the Japanese efficiency the game would be too easy.

CL: I disagree about depth charge effectiveness. In the real *war they were a big joke compared to what was happening in the Atlantic. However, I do take your point about playability. I just would have liked to see the kill ratio lower since that was real case.*

AH: The real cause of Japanese ineffectiveness was inexperienced sonar operators. The Americans had the same problem in the Atlantic during 1942.

RH: Regarding 'Embarrassment of Riches' and similar scenarios occurring on Career Patrols: if I put torpedoes on long range, 'good' targets duck out of the way, leaving me with only short range insignificant targets. This means that the big fish gets away and I can't move for squat compared to it. Any suggestions without giving away too much?

AH: Ships can see torps coming, that's why you want to fire at about 1000 yards. The real problem you mention is trying to get *both* carriers. Our playtesters only did it when the were *very* lucky.

RG: Try guessing the direction of turn on one carrier, and if you cripple it you can return to it later. Then go after the other one – the destroyers will try to defend the mobile carrier.

RH: How many torps to sink a carrier? I pumped five into one's stern then broadsided it with a sixth before it finally went down. Does location matter?

AH: Angle of fire is more important than location. If you are using historical Mark 14s, the variations between duds and the 'normal' torpedoes means that damage results can be quite random.

RG: Actually the major variation in a carrier/battleship sinking is often fire – if alight it will sink quite quickly. However, there is no upper limit on the number of torps needed to sink a large ship. Keep hitting it until you set it on fire.

CL: I was going to comment that today it took me a total of 20 Mk 14s (historical) to sink a Carrier. A lot *of duds. I know how the guys on Tinosa felt!*

AH: We had similar problems too.

RG: Try keeping an 'S' boat for a while at the beginning of the war – this class had flawless Mk10 torps although not as effective as Mk14 at least they worked.

RH: I was wondering if you would please expound on the 'angle of fire' comment you made earlier.

AH: Angle of fire affects your accuracy rather than your damage, but it also effects dud probabilities. Firing into a broadside causes more duds than firing parallel to his course. See pages 66 & 67 of the manual.

RH: Ahhhhh... I see it here now. I'm not a manual fan in general.

AH: See, manuals are worth something after all.

*RH: Between **SSI** and **SSII**, it is obvious that the graphics and types of ships, subs, and weapons have been enhanced. My question is: what has been done to the computer AI in **SSII**?*

AH: Not very much. The AI in the original was quite good.

RG: The main change was in the area of defending ships and ASW sweeps – and the differences between ship types.

CL: The old S-boats carried 12 whole torps with smaller warheads, while the interim classes carried 16, and later, 24. Does this mean the scoring works at a roughly proportional level to the inverse of the number of torps carried?

AH: Sorry, no. The old 'S' class and the Narwhal classes give the best score. We rated all attributes of the boats, not just torps carried. Sorry I don't have my point data with me.

CL: But if I sink identical convoys...?

RG: The problems of the older boats are: limited dive depth, torp load-out limitations, speed difficulties, and easier sonar detection. Basically they score well until the IJN gets a good sonar operator approx in 1943. We give a 2x multiplier to all boats below Gato Class, though each boat class has a separate scoring factor.

CL: I just haven't been able to see that it pays to play 'S' class.

RG: The patrol areas in 1941/1942 are quiet destroyer and patrol boat wise, so the 'S' boat with its multiplier and easier targets gives the best combination of factors, unless you play a perfect game.

CL: I scored 2690 with a Gato on first war patrol. Never came near that with an 'S'.

AH: 2690 with *any* boat is a fabulous score!

*CL: Is there any plan to allow players give bearing orders to helm like in **Red Storm Rising**, where you can also give a 'set course to' command?*

AH: Sorry no, but instead we gave you 'N' key command to set course to, and 'M' set view to course key. This encourages conning from your eyeball. Like they did in WWII.

RG: The new 'l' key will allow 180° rotation of the scope.

RH: Lastly, I'd like our friends at MPS to recommend the best ship choices for ultimate realism throughout an entire war career. Please give years if possible.

AH: Randomly select a class to start. If you get a 'T' or Gato class, start at Pearl Harbor. If you get an older class then start at either port, and go to new construction before the end of 1942. If you got a 'T' or Gato go to new construction any time before summer of 1944. We are uploading more historical ideas in a text file available tomorrow.

AH & RG: Good night all and thanks for inviting us. It has been a real pleasure. SP

A data disk of enhancements for Silent Service II can be downloaded from CompuServe.

For details of CompuServe membership, call : 0800 289 378

STORMOVIK

From Russia With Love

by Paul Rigby

THE RELEASE of **Stormovik** highlights a growing trend among software publishers to jump on the *Glasnost* bandwagon with a flight simulation depicting a Soviet aircraft. Electronic Arts effort simulates the Sukhoi Su-25 ground attack aircraft that is, basically, the Soviet version of America's A-10.

Everything about this product recalls EA's earlier release, **LHX**. The manual looks the same, the 3-D graphics look the same, the gameplay and design policies are the same.

The scenario is an interesting one. You must fly a Su-25 in the Red Guard Strike Force to prevent the East/West talks being disrupted and the Third World War being started by warmongering terrorists and politicians from both the USA and USSR. There are three years within the game. Each year consists of about 10 missions, all of which become progressively more difficult.

Heads Up, Comrade

When you begin the game you choose a pilot name and the rank you require. The rank choice directly translates as a difficulty level. After this you choose your mission. They are varied and interesting (as are your opponents). For example you can fly low level reconnaissance, destroy artillery sites, ambush a tank division, escort a rescue operation and so on.

Each mission uses preset waypoints that provide your mission course. An indicator on your HUD will tell you if you are on course. Once you have chosen your mission it is on to the weapon loading screen. You'll see a head-on shot of your aircraft. Each pylon can then be highlighted and the weapon selected – if it is in stock. After this you are plonked onto the tarmac ready for take-off.

Graphics are effective and pretty detailed although not especially quick if the game needs to update large on-screen objects (even on a fast PC).

The sound is pretty good through an AdLib soundboard (although the intro music is dreadful). There is a whole gamut of interior and external viewpoints, panning views, circling views – you name it! The one big disappointment is the internal viewpoints. Sure you can look left and right, but you do not see side-console views. Instead, the front view of the cockpit follows you around the aircraft. Therefore, you can be looking to your left and still have the front-view of the cockpit on-screen! I can understand the possible benefits of such a view system but it should have been relegated to an option – not the default. As it is the view cuts the realism and can be disorientating. One irreverent good point from this interior view is the colour of the cockpit. It is pretty close to the real thing and simulates the predominant interior finish.

Shaky Flight Model

The flight model of the Su-25 is poor. I can say with confidence – even in these days of Glasnost – that EA have not included a Su-25 flight model. It is plainly fictionalised. The stall characteristics are atrocious. When you stall, you can still raise you nose – even if you are travelling at 0 mph!

In addition, during the stall you can crash, brick-like, without ever dropping your nose at all. Rates of loop appear to be rather too fast for this class of aircraft. You do lose altitude when you bank, though.

Landing is an interesting challenge (especially if you're damaged – which can vary) as you are liable to bounce if you land too heavily. Played as a serious flight simulation **Stormovik** will have you in fits of laughter. However, if you play it as it was obviously designed – as a 'fun game' in the classic 'Interceptor' class of flight sims – you will reap much enjoyment from it. SP

WE LIKE...

Flight Simulator 4
Microsoft (PC)

Silent Service II
Microprose (PC)

Flight of the Intruder
Mirrorsoft (All)

Moonbase
Mindscape (Import PC)

Harpoon
Mirrorsoft (PC)

Designed by
Paul Grace

Published by
Electronic Arts

Price £24.99

Available for PC

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MAXX YOKE

Paul Rigby goes to work on an egg

THE MAXX yoke, from American accessories company Maxximum, is aimed fairly and squarely at flight simulations, although driving games are an obvious addition to that list. Arriving with an 11 page manual the yoke is a solid beast that exudes quality – both in its build and its 'feel'. The Yoke is constructed from a strong, durable plastic. When clamped to the desktop you will see two 'fire' buttons on the yoke wheel extremities, plus a throttle slider control mounted vertically on the central column beneath the wheel. The wheel can be turned from side-to-side (60°) and pushed in and out of the supporting column using a supporting spring to give the 2.2 inches of pressure 'feel'.

Desktop

However, before I venture any further, it is the clamping-to-the-desk bit that I had problems with. The yoke is attached to the desktop via two screw knobs that close a plastic lower plate to the underside of the desk. The trouble is that the screw threads on the knobs are far too short for a 'standard' size desk. Mine is just under two inches (less than two centimeters) thick. Older or more substantial desks may have no problem. I contacted UK distributors RC Simulations about the problem. They are rather miffed about this themselves, and have contacted Maxximum in the States with a polite request to pull their socks up. In the meantime, RC Simulations have offered to supply customers with custom-made extended screw threads that will solve the problem.

Once that niggle was brushed aside it was time to load up some software. The MAXX Yoke is available for the PC, Amiga and ST. The Amiga/ST version of the yoke has a digital/analogue switch that will force those respective computers into analogue mode. I know of two simulations that respond to this analogue system: Sublogic's **Flight Simulator** and Microprose's recently released **F-19 Stealth Fighter**. I only had the opportunity to review the PC version of the MAXX so I cannot give a conclusive opinion on the Amiga/ST performance. However, I have heard that, while the analogue mode on the Amiga/ST is by no means perfect (a little jumpy?) it is more than acceptable. In fact, this slight 'jumpy' feature has been praised in certain quarters as a realistic simulation of air turbulence!

Sensation

Three flight simulations were examined on the PC for use with the MAXX. **Flight Simulator 4, F-19** and Mirrorsoft's **Flight of the Intruder** (**FOTI**). Installation of the yoke on **FS4** was as simple as you might find. After you plug in the standard joystick plug and load the game, you make sure the yoke lies in its central position (after the on-screen prompt), press enter and away you go! The fire buttons initiate the brakes and the throttle works. As yoke control is the method of flying in the majority of private aircraft the addition of the yoke extends realism no-end. The artificial pressure feel gives you a sensation that you're fighting the forces of nature as you glide amongst the simulated cloud formations. The yoke's throttle control is a definite bonus that is very intuitive and provides a natural extension to the yoke.

Superstick

Using the Yoke on the two combat sims was just as enjoyable, although rather less 'realistic' as combat fighter/attack aircraft generally use a control column 'stick'. Configuration was more complicated involving moving the yoke to its extremities in order for the PC to recognise the X-Y limits. However the feel of the yoke and the amount of control extended within both simulations made the yoke a viable accessory. **F-19** did not recognise the throttle, though. One fire button used the cannon while the other controlled the weapons in the bay area. **FOTI** is a similar case, unless you select 'superstick' in which case you can use the throttle and the rudder controlled via the keyboard or Maxximum's rudder pedals (purchased separately and the subject of a possible future review). In conclusion, therefore, if you can bear the steep price and make sure you sort yourself out with the screw threads, the MAXX yoke is a essential accessory. SP

MAXX Yoke costs £79.50 from R C Simulations

Compatible with Flight Simulator 4, Flight of the Intruder, Indy 500

NEXT ISSUE:

MOONBASE
BATTLETECH II
JONES IN THE FAST LANE

STRATEGY IN IMPERIUM

THE INFOCOM STORY

PLUS PLUS PLUS

A GAME TOO HARD

Design Notes for Avalon Hill's Republic of Rome, by Don Greenwood

LIKE the bridge too far of Arnhem fame, **Republic of Rome** was a game which came perilously close to being abandoned during its development. The game was simply too hard to win. I must admit at the outset that your editor's request to describe my travails during the development of our new release has caught me off guard. How do you discuss a game – indeed a very unusual game which defies comparison – before its release without seeming to patronise it?

Obviously, a review is the province of others less biased than I. Nonetheless, as this article will appear before the game I feel it necessary to give the reader some background. I herein quote verbatim from the preview appearing in Vol 26, No 1 of *General* which served to whet the appetites of our own readers for this game of ancient politics.

Chrome

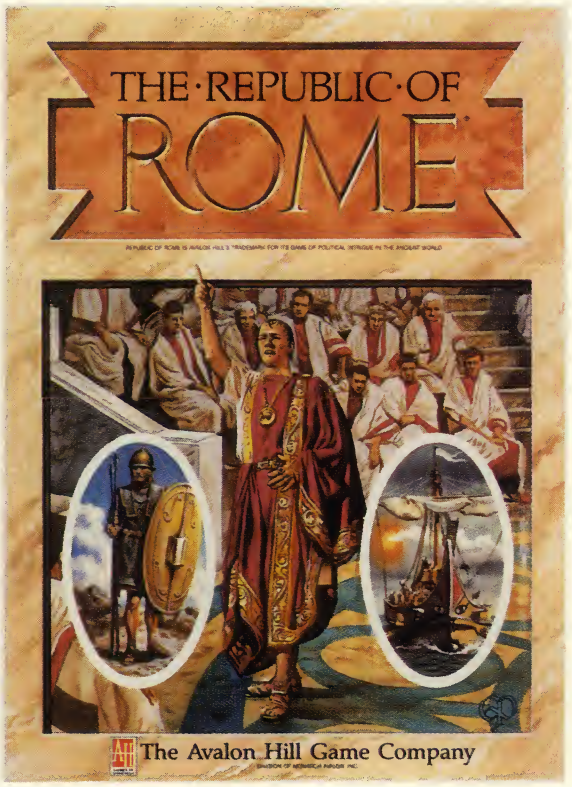
'**Republic of Rome** is primarily a political game, with military overtones, for three to six players. It is very different to anything I've ever seen before: that uniqueness is one of the reasons that I'm so enamoured with it. Admittedly, the other reason is that it is hip-deep in chrome from a historical period that I love. I'm usually not one for diplomatic games. I hate **Diplomacy**, and was never really wild about either **Civilization** or **Kingmaker** – both of which I consider overly complicated and too long to play comfortably. **Republic of Rome** is every bit as innovative, and much shorter. Experienced players have finished a game in four to six hours.

Although it contains a 16" by 22" board, the game's main component is a deck of 192 illustrated cards. However, it would be a mistake to classify **Republic of Rome** as a card game. The political wheeling and dealing and the richness of historical detail far exceed that found in most games of that genre. The cards simply make it easy to painlessly pack a lot of detail into a relatively clean sequence of play in an attractive manner.

Wargamers addicted to hexes and moving forces around a map may not care for this game. The board is purely organisational and used to track the Republic's finances, the degree of public satisfaction with the senatorial government, and the display of cards which dictate the game action. Each player starts the game in command of a faction of three prominent senators with differing Military, Oratory, Loyalty and Influence ratings whose goal is to increase their individual Influence to the point at which they control Rome. Thus, all the factions are at odds with one another as they jockey for position, cutting deals to undermine each other and promote their own interests.

But this is where it gets interesting. All of these adversarial factions also need to cooperate with each other to run the State lest Rome fall to internal strife or foreign wars. If the players do not act in concert for the good of all, Rome inevitably falls and all players lose. Human nature being what it is, newcomers often ignore the warnings and lose their initial games until the hard lesson sinks in: work together or die together. This balance between the need for individual advancement and the common good proves to be a two-edged sword that keeps the players constantly guessing as to the true intentions of their fellows. Those who are too paranoid lose to the game system; those not careful enough lose to a power-grabbing opponent. this is just the best of many finely-tuned checks and balances that make **Republic of Rome** an exquisite game of timing.

Along the way historical figures such as Pompey, Cicero and Caesar emerge from the ranks of the senators with special capabilities to liven things up. The game has three decks of colour-coded cards to enable play of three separate scenarios dealing with the Early, Middle or Late Republic. Alternately, players can throw away playing time concerns and combine all three into a Campaign Game spanning the life of the Republic. The Advanced version introduces a new office: *Pontifex Maximus,* showing the effect of religion on Roman politics. Provincial forces, which can get involved in border wars or revolt and march on Rome to bring more spice to the military aspect, are also added.'



Gossip

So much for the game description. Now for some behind-the- scenes gossip Brian wanted me to dredge up. The project started nearly two years ago when a University professor named Richard Berthold, who specialises in Ancient History, wrote to describe a game of Roman politics. Not unlike many others trying to peddle their designs, he assured me that this game was complete and ready to be published as it stood. Naturally this intrigued me because games of this ilk which can be pub-

Republic of Rome will be published by Avalon Hill next month. A full review will appear in this magazine shortly afterwards.

lished as submitted are very rare animals. I've yet to see one in my twenty years of screening submissions at the Hill. After several readings and compiling a list of about 200 questions, we attempted our first game. We lost.

The game was hardly ready for publication, but what an interesting premise. You had to scheme and plot against your fellow players, but there was a larger adversary: the game itself. And to beat it, you needed the assistance of the same players that you were trying to defeat. So, armed with 200 answers and a concession from Berthold that maybe the game wasn't quite ready for publication after all, we played again, though much differently. We lost anyway, but we were hooked.

Hypothetical

Now, normally games of deceit aren't my bag. I guess I'm just not a very good liar. But there was something endearing about this political game that kept drawing me back to it and it certainly wasn't my win-loss record. Loss four followed, as did five, six and seven in rapid succession. Or as rapidly as you can expect from a five hour game. At this point we changed the entire scope of the game from a hypothetical setting running the gamut of the Republic to a historical one divided into the three separate scenarios. But that didn't stop us losing.

Losing eight games in a row isn't my idea of ego gratification, so along the way we made more changes: making the game a bit more user-friendly after every loss. And it had an effect: the losses were taking longer. But they were losses nonetheless. More changes followed losses nine and 10.

At this point I had to take a morale check. Heck... just thinking about it makes me lapse into **Squad Leader** jargon. We kept making the game easier but we continued to lose. Perhaps it was time for some introspection. Among our group of intrepid testers was one 'Rex the Merciless' who readers of the *General* will recognise as one who claims to be both an editor and a **Diplomacy** player of some repute. However, his 'Me first, last, and always' style of play leads me to doubt his prowess. 'Co-operate' is a dirty word for our esteemed editor. 'If there isn't something in it for me, then it doesn't get done' is his motto. Thus it was that Rome fell to foreign wars in loss 11 and to domestic unrest in loss 12.

Rex proved to be more than just a local hindrance. His obstinate play emphasised a fatal flaw in the game. What does one do when a player perceives himself as out of the running, and plays instead for a draw; ie for everyone to lose? It does little good to wish that the sorehead would literally fall on his sword, sharing the fate of his cardboard constituents. The fact that the player takes solace in seeing everyone lose when he himself cannot win was for a long time looked upon as the Achilles' heel of the game. No one wants to play a game they feel they cannot win. Games 13 to 16 beat us again and spirits were low.

Carousel

I'd like to say that I came up with a brilliant solution at this point, but I can't. The 'Solution' came only with the gradual realisation that a player is never out of contention, no matter how poor his position. Game 17 saw me demonstrate this as I rose from the dregs of a one Senator faction to win with 35 influence. The details of the win are unimportant: there are many ways to win. The crucial thing to recognise is that the lead changes from turn to turn, and only by keeping the game going can you hope to be in the lead when the carousel stops. I won the next game too. And the next. The game had turned the corner. It could be won by – lo and behold! – a little cooperation among the players. That and a few dozen rule changes.

The blind playtest groups' experiences mirrored our own. They couldn't win. The game was too hard. Many gave up in disgust, but among those who remained the game grew in reputation. Phrases like 'The best game of the decade' were bandied about.

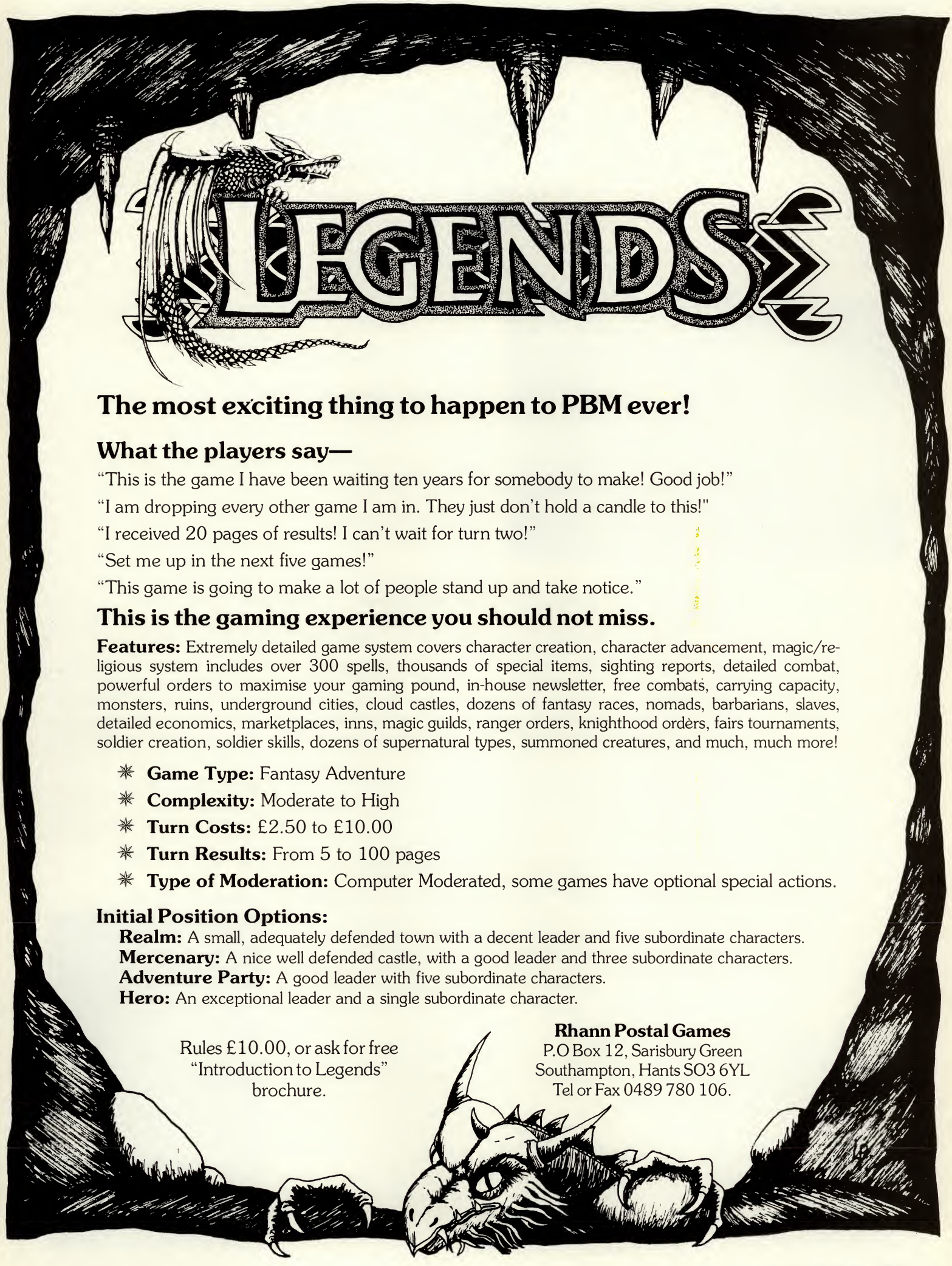
I harbour no such hopes. **Republic of Rome** is not for everyone. It seems that no game is these days. Heck, the best seller we ever had, **Squad Leader,** had one of our poorest playtest performances because it was tested by people who didn't appreciate its randomness. It was a very different type of game to what those testers were used to. The same can be said for **Republic of Rome**. For starters, it is very rules intensive. The 24 pages of rules and designer's notes can be intimidating. On the other hand, once someone has mastered the flow of the game, it is a relatively simple matter to teach it to others as the components shoulder much of the rules burden. Moreover, there are no pieces to move around a hex grid so this immediately disqualifies it as a wargame to many. More importantly, it is not a game with an easily perceived best strategy dominated by player actions. Instead, the game determines the course of events to which the players must react. I liken this to a game whose primary purpose is to entertain rather than one where a player's own strategy dictates the action. It is more important to bide one's time and recognise an opportunity when it appears than to constantly work towards personal advancement. But above all, it is hard to win, and few players will have the patience to give it 17 tries.

Fortunately, you can benefit from our experience and avoid our frustrations by taking our advice to heart when you read the Players Notes in the rule book. Keep uppermost in mind that cooperation is crucial in the early going. Like **Risk**, The game is in no danger of being won during the early turns. It is, however, in great danger of being lost. With competent play, no player should be able to win in the first five turns. Despite this, newcomers invariably become entangled in internecine squabbles over the smallest advantage from the outset, thus setting the tone for scores to be settled later. It is this constant judgment call over what it is worth offending another player for that makes the game so interesting.

Revolt

The first scenario is by far the toughest. Just as Rome was in real danger from outside sources only during the days of Carthage, the Early Republic scenario is the only one in which the outside factors are more dangerous than one's fellow players. In the later scenarios, the real threat lies in the threat of revolt from a player. Of course, that results in distrust of commanders in the field, which tends to reduce the size of their commands. This in turn makes Rome's adversaries all the more powerful on their own.

It is all part of a seemingly endless series of checks and balances which I find truly fascinating. But if your group has a tender psyche and can't stand the thought of losing to an inanimate object, move on quickly to the later scenarios. However, if you fancy yourself as a real gamer and want to tackle Carthage head on, do yourself a favour. Stack the deck when nobody is looking. Put the Second Punic War card on or near the bottom. Even veteran players have to be lucky to survive an early appearance of Hannibal. SP



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WORLD WAR 2

European Theatre Of Operations

by Jonathan Turner

Reviewing a game based on the grand strategy of the Second World War puts a games hack in much the same position as a theatre critic reviewing the latest version of *Hamlet:* the first question to be addressed is not whether it works or not, but whether it justifies its existence in the light of the plethora of attempts that have gone before. With **World War Two: European Theatre of Operations**, TSR seems to be hedging its bets by barraging the player with components.

This is a game of enormous detail, whose list of contents could be a parody of that of any leviathan game. There are over 1000 counters, including specific pieces for each of the capital ships involved. The two mapsheets included, which are more pleasing to the eye than any others from games based on the Second World War, dwarf even those of **World In Flames**.The game also includes a rule book that resembles the London Services Phone Directory, and so many other pamphlets of miscellaneous charts and tables that it looks like the inside of the box was on hell's junk mail list.

In terms of dead trees, then, the game is certainly value for money, even at its slightly rarefied price. Moreover, the game system itself is not exactly a slouch. It is a reissue of an SPI game, but it has been tweaked a fair bit. This is particularly apparent in the air and naval rules, although those for supply have also been revised fairly comprehensively.

In any game of this complexity, one of the most important considerations is clarity, and this is where TSR really stand head and shoulders above their major competition: although reading fifty pages of rules is never going to be a joy, at least one can hope to avoid unnecessary pain in so doing. The rule book for **WWII: ETO** is clear, well laid out and allows play with the minimal amount of homework. This is backed up by the scenario book: the first three scenarios each cover one of the major aspects of the game, thus allowing the player to fiddle around with the naval, air and land counters in turn before having to deal with them all together.

Slings And Arrows

The feel of the game is particularly impressive, when one finally graduates to the major scenarios. It has a system that relies heavily on forward strategic planning (for example, offensives for a given season should be paid for at its outset, as the cost of impromptu offensives is twice as much) while having a similar flip-flop system in game turns to the **Storm Over Arnhem** series which makes minute tactical planning an impossibility. Each offensive activates an HQ and all the counters in its command radius, or a general and all the counters adjacent to him, or a single stack. These then break through, fight and exploit, after which it is the enemy's turn. This sequence continues until both players have had enough of the current month. This is only true for the land phase, but there are so many opportunities for interception in the air and naval phases that they feel almost simultaneous anyway!

Upon this extremely firm bedrock the mountains of chrome are built, and here the game really comes into its own. The specifics are mind-boggling: for example, the Russian General Zhukov gets a section of the rules all to himself! My particular favourite is the way in which different nations pay different amounts for units; thus the Germans pay comparatively little for their Panzers, but pay through the nose for their ships, the Russian infantry are dirt cheap, and so on. Also, rather than the slightly simplistic Capital bashing of **Third Reich**, all of the major industrial centres of a country must be captured to succeed in conquest. (Although, of course, there are specific rules for the capture of France and Italy, oh, and Britain as well...)

Short of listing all the specific cases, with a liberal dash of the historic and ahistoric variants, it is difficult to do this game justice. The extraordinary aspect is that play of it is so smooth under the weight of all the chrome.

World War Two: European Theatre of Operations is an excellent game for the adamantine-hardcore gamer. We are also told that a compatible companion volume will be available next year: **World War Two: Pacific Theatre of Operations**. This could be just what we were all looking for to fill the odd idle decade when we don't have anything better to do. Other than go and see *Hamlet,* of course. SP

Designed by
Douglas Niles

Published by
TSR

Price £29.95

This is a revised and enhanced version of the SPI game which appeared in the mid 70s

WE LIKE...

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(Abacus)

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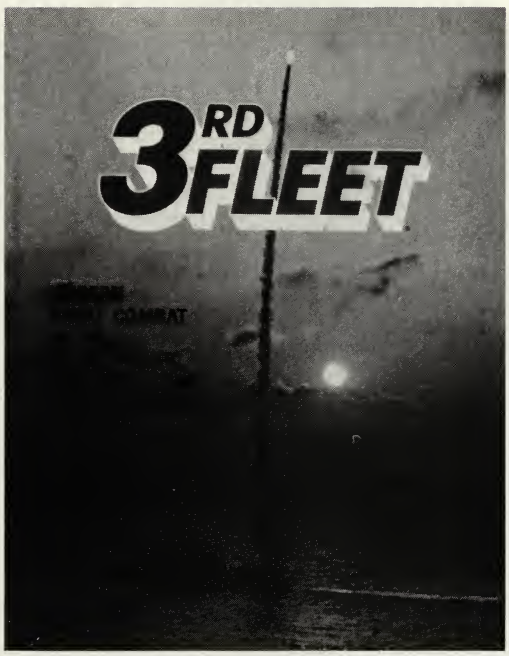
3RD FLEET

The Navy Lark

by Gordon Sweeney



JOE BALKOSKI'S **3rd Fleet** is the fifth in this series of games covering modern naval combat. While the others (**6th, 2nd, 7th** and **5th Fleet**) each focused on one area of operations (the Med, North Atlantic, Western Pacific and Indian Ocean respectively), **3rd Fleet** consists of three separate maps portraying the North Pacific, Caribbean and East Atlantic. (In fact the real US 3rd Fleet has responsibility for the North Pacific region only).

Apart from the maps the box contains a 60 page rule and scenario book, a host of displays, pads, charts and tables, one ten sided die and over 700 5/8" and 1/2" back-printed counters. Unfortunately these don't all fit into the counter tray provided. This probably isn't surprising since there are units from the navies of the USA, Canada, 11 European countries, USSR and six Latin American countries. (The game already shows its age by having both East and West German pieces.) Overall the components are of the highest quality. My only reservation is that the hex numbers are hard to read against the dark blue sea hexes.

The hefty rule book looks somewhat intimidating at first glance, but this impression soon fades. Its layout is superb with clear headings and helpful examples. The basic game systems are gradually introduced by the first nine scenarios, three of which are played on each map. These range from a submarine-borne commando raid which can be played in less than an hour to a large Soviet pre-emptive strike against American bases in the Pacific. These scenarios have clearly been well thought out. I found even the simplest of them to be challenging and fun to play. Most enjoyable was a war between an angry Latin coalition and a lone US carrier group. There are then three more scenarios which allow use of the advanced and optional rules (such as weather and logistics). These are more involved affairs which would probably require a weekend to complete.

There are three game turns to a day. Every day players can allocate aircraft to one of four strategic missions – interception, reconnaissance, mining and tactical co-ordination. For this purpose the maps are divided into separate zones. In each turn aircraft not on strategic missions can be assigned to CAP (Combat Air Patrol), in effect standing guard over an airfield or aircraft carrier. Remaining aircraft can be used to attack enemy bases or units in the Action Phase.

In many ways the detection system is the key to the game. Before enemy units can be attacked, they have to be located. They can be detected by reconnaissance aircraft or when they stray too close to the opponent's forces or bases. Subs are always harder to find than surface vessels, but some are easier to find than others (the Russians have some noisy ones!). It's worth noting that there are no hidden units – everything is placed on the board even if undetected.

Once a unit has been detected there are several ways of attacking it. Torpedoes, SSMs (Surface-to-Surface Missiles), bombs and anti-submarine warfare are all available. Additionally, Cruise Missiles can be used against ports and airfields (although they rarely seem to be as effective as regular bombing). The advanced game adds tactical nuclear weapons and close combat, the refitted Second World War battleship New Jersey being particularly accomplished at the latter.

All combat except for air-to-air is resolved on one table. In most cases both attacker and defender roll a die to determine the result. Thus there is a large spread of possible outcomes – probably realistic but annoying if you lose a carrier to a couple of bad rolls! All in all, the game systems work extremely well considering the complexity. As has been said of the earlier games, Mr Balkoski has got the playability vs realism balance just about right.

For those owning older Fleet games, **3rd Fleet** has the usual combat factor updates and several minor changes to rules, charts and tables. The most significant is that there are now six rather than three segments in the Action Phase. This makes it harder to predict exactly what order everything is going to move in. Also the US player can now launch sneak attacks with the F-117A 'Stealth Fighter'.

Despite my high opinion of this game, I would hesitate to recommend it to anyone new to wargaming. After the first few scenarios there is quite a lot going on. To others with an interest in this type of game who don't already own one of the series, I would unreservedly recommend this one. Aficionados of the series will have to judge for themselves whether or not their enthusiasm merits the price tag. They may be disappointed there is no multi-map campaign. On the plus side, however, with three maps there is more scope for coming up with new scenarios.

Let's just hope with the advent of *Glasnost* that **3rd Fleet** becomes an historical, rather than a contemporary, 'what if'. SP

Designed by
Joe Balkoski

Published by
Victory Games

Price £28.35

BOOM TOWN

Croquet In The Ghetto

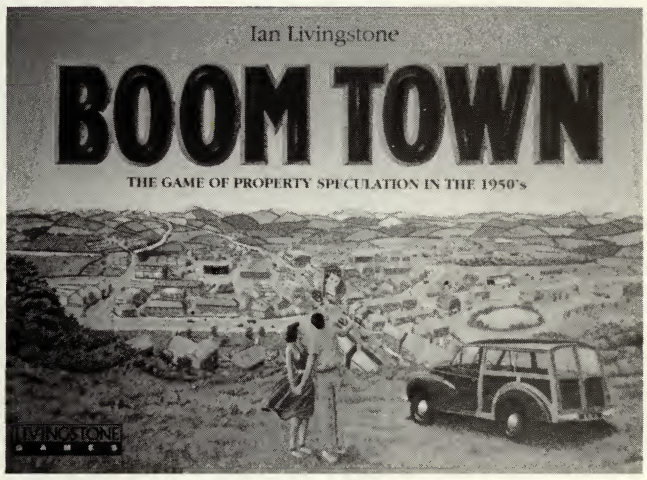
by Jonathan Turner

HAVE YOU ever wondered what strange drugs the town planners of Milton Keynes, Telford, Harlow and all the other pimples on our otherwise green and unpleasant land were on when they did their jobs? Well, although **Boom Town** doesn't cast much light on this particular question, it does give you the chance to emulate one of these poor pieces of human flotsam.

Boom Town is a game for four, five, or six developers which is at its best when played with a full complement. The board is split up into six areas, into which the players in turn place houses and utilities until the town is complete. There are two types of utilities: the yellow backed small businesses, ranging from amusement arcades and undertakers valued at -3 to bookshops and ballet schools at +3; and the larger, blue installations, ranging from -6 to +6 which include things like foundries, factories and abattoirs on the negative side and parks, duck ponds and croquet lawns on the positive.

The object of the game is to get your houses into the nicest areas, while making sure all your opponents' tenants languish in the slums.

The houses and utilities are put out very gradually, with only one article being placed on the board at any one time, so the game gives an excellent feel for the way in which each of the suburbs is developing and which ones will be the most profitable.



At the end of the game, the total value of each area is multiplied by the number of houses each player has in it for the final scores, so you are constantly keeping track of their respective values, as it is quite easy to miss out on the most profitable ones if you're not careful. The basic tactic is to make sure you have at least one more house in each of the most profitable areas than your opponents as this is a sure route to victory (which is probably why it's usually so difficult to arrange).

The twist of the game is that everyone has a 'Planning Permission Refused' card, which can be used once per turn to veto someone else's designs, whether it be to build a cricket ground in their own territory or the town jail in yours. The problem is that once it is used the same opponent has another turn, which opens this part of the game up to an interesting element of bluff as you are constantly wondering if they really have done their worst.

Boom Town is an excellent family game which lasts about forty-five minutes to an hour. Although it doesn't tell you much about town planning, your own towns can end up looking just as ridiculous as real new towns! SP

Designed by
Ian Livingstone

Published by
Livingstone Games

Price £25

3-6 players

Playing time: 90 minutes

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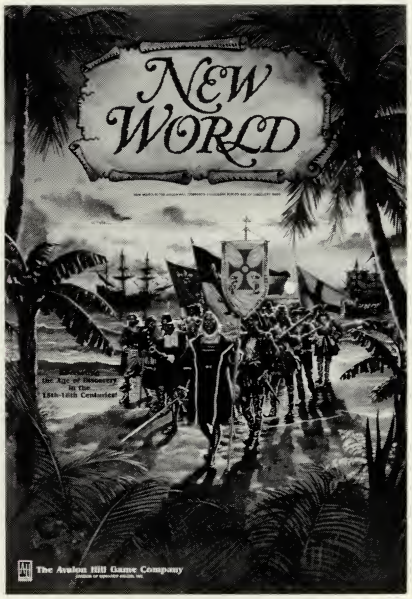
NEW WORLD

Viva La Conquistador!

by Brian Walker



Designed by
Derek Carver

Published by
Avalon Hill

Price £20.45

2-6 players

Playing time 5-6 hours

IN OUR last issue the designer of this game, Derek Carver, provided an excellent description of how **New World** evolved, but for those who missed this a brief refresher is necessary. Each player (up to six) represents a colonial power attempting to explore and conquer a large piece of land to the west of Ireland. Gold is there for the taking, but the indigenous population will have to be pacified (ie slaughtered) first. For reference, the game is a vastly simplified version of Avalon Hill's earlier **Conquistador**, while computer gamers who have strayed into this section may care to note that the game resembles SSG's **Gold of the Americas** without the hidden agenda.

The game mechanics recall the SPI games that flourished in the mid seventies: total all modifiers, roll a die, read off a table and so on. This is perfectly acceptable and works fine in this context. What is unacceptable is the game *physically* resembles an SPI game (apart from the mounted mapboard and lack of errata). The tables have been printed on the mapboard instead of player aid cards being provided. This is not just an aesthetic carp – with four or more players it is impossible for all players to read the information right way up. What **New World** needed was a mapboard which reflected the expanse of its subject matter. What it got was something which resembles Piccadilly Circus in the rush hour. The feeling of corners being cut is further enhanced by the case of the missing fleet card. On the reverse of these is a turn summary. The game leader is advised to use this to guide players through the turn. However, only six are provided, so if six are playing this proves an impossibility as the Fleet side of the card will be in use.

As to the game itself (you were wondering), it works fine within its limits. The question of whether or not these limits are acceptable is an entirely subjective one. I enjoy the game immensely – it achieves exactly what it sets out to do and provides a good five hours entertainment. However, there are those who will demur from this view. The luck element will certainly not appeal to the purist, though ironically this provides a realistic representation of the uncertainty of the period and in doing so, succinctly destroys the pretensions of those gamers who believe that every cry of 'Eureka!' was the result of a strategic master plan.

Quite sensibly a number of optional rules have been included. The most interesting variant is the random discovery implemented by placing hex tiles face down on the board. Naturally this *adds* to the luck element, and yet simulates the feeling of venturing into the unknown. Perversely, this can also mean New York ending up with a desert-like climate.

The standard set up, where all territories are visible, provides a more tactical game. In this, players can see the risks involved in certain actions and elect whether or not to gamble. In this sense it can be seen that players, to a certain degree, determine the amount of luck they want to put in their game.

The box lettering describes its contents as a 'simple game of strategy'. But simple to whom? To wargamers, maybe, but the simplified combat system means that it is unlikely they would be attracted to this game. What, then, would a novice, perhaps buying an Avalon Hill game for the first time, make of a set of rules that look as if they escaped from a seminar on legal semantics? No attempt is made to guide newcomers through a game turn, the underlying assumption being that anyone buying this game *must* have played a Avalon Hill game before – an extraordinary philosophy in the best of times, but in a contracting market it seems like madness.

Lest this seem a bit harsh, let's take a few examples: the first turn is completely different to the rest yet no attempt is made to distinguish it as such. Furthermore, you have to turn to page 4 to actually find a cursory description hiding in the middle of the last column. And this is the point from where you are supposed to start the game! Even an experienced player would struggle with this one, but a beginner...? In the native combat phase, you are told that the combat system is 'the same' as player vs player. You then turn to this paragraph heading only to be referred to a sub paragraph. A few examples of play are provided (in a tiny typeface) but nowhere near enough. Graphic examples are non existent. The sequence of play, on what passes as the player aid card, does not correspond to the numbered paragraphs in the rule book. Needless to say, no index is provided.

TSR and MB (in their Gamemaster series) have both shown what can be done in the way of providing a user friendly rules structure. Unfortunately though, the SPI example of growing up with your market, instead of constantly seeking to expand into new ones, has again been followed. Avalon Hill would defend their system on the grounds that they conform to a consistent 'house style'. To this I can only respond by quoting the words of songsters the New Papa Girl Rappers: 'Blow the house down for a new generation'. SP

BOOM TOWN

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BOOM TOWN in its Limited Edition print run of 1000 copies will soon be out of print. But STRATEGY PLUS has been able to acquire a number of copies to sell to our readers. All the copies we have of this excellent game are numbered and signed by Ian Livingstone. The game is destined to become a valuable collectors' item. An investment in one could prove as safe as houses...

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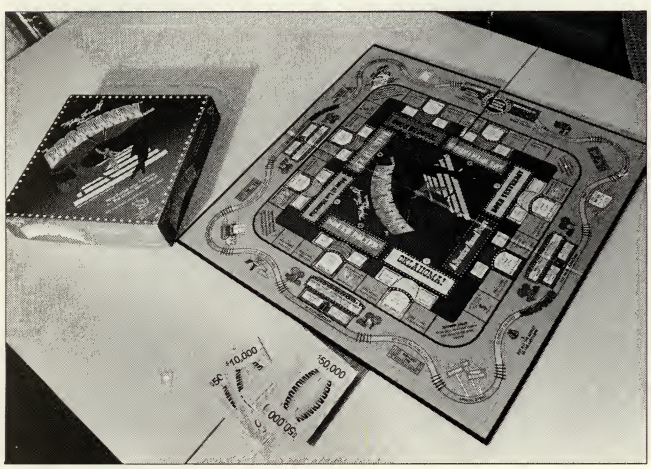
Christmas Crackers

Acquire (Avalon Hill)
Still trading after all these years, this is a genuine classic. Easy to learn, tough to play well. Close on the perfect boardgame. 2-6 players.

Airlines (Abacus)
A new game from the fertile mind of Alan R Moon. Players compete for airline routes in a manner that resembles **Acquire**. 2-6 players.



Asterix (J W Spear)
Nifty little card game which takes its name from the French cartoon character. At £4.95 you can't go wrong. 3-5 players.

Boom Town (Livingstone Games)
Although involving property, this is one game where you do not have to pass go. A nice mixture of skill and bluff, **Boom Town** is a perfect pastiche of a fifties-style boardgame (reviewed this issue). 3-6 players.

Broadway (TSR)
Good old-fashioned family game in which players invest in musicals then attempt to present them on the Great White Way. 4-6 players.

Buck Rogers (TSR)
First class **Risk**-in-space game with great components. Best with five players.

Dealer McDope Dope Game (Last Gasp Games)
Ideal present for those who like a puff after their pud, this far out game is available from Last Gasp Games (seriously) in San Francisco. Essentially this is a trading game involving the safe delivery of certain substances for maximum profits. 2-6 heads.

The New Dungeon Game (TSR)
Not too dissimilar to the old **Dungeon** game. Light-hearted fantasy with good quality components. But where's the comfy chair? 2-6 players.

Enchanted Forest (Ravensburger)
Typically tricky memory game from Alex Randolph. German 'Game of the Year' in '82. Best with four players.

Family Business (Spielfreaks)
Unavailable for many years, this classic card game has just been republished in a splendid new edition. Best with 4-6 players.

Grass (Executive Games)
Excellent card game with dodgy theme of dope dealing. A minor classic. Best with 4-6 players.

Hare & Tortoise (Gibsons)
Classic race game from David Parlett based on Aesop's fable. Winner of several international awards. 2-6 players.

Heisse Schlacht (Ravensburger)
Terrific little dice game formerly known as **Kangaroo**. 3-6 players.

Jump The Queue (Spears)
Good family game with a fair amount of strategy if you ignore the joker face on the die.

Kremlin (Avalon Hill)
Satirical game of purging and denouncement in the Soviet politburo. Lots of room for strategy and player interaction. Highly recommended. 4-6 players.

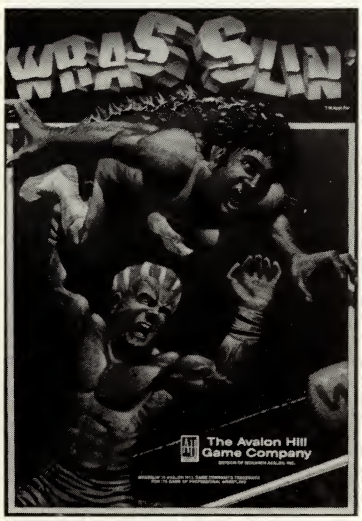
Labyrinth (Ravensburger)
Nicely put together maze game. Primarily aimed at children, but challenging for adults, too. 2-4 players.

Mertwig's Maze (TSR)
One of the bargains of the year. A humorous, easy to learn, fantasy game for those who don't like fantasy games. 2-6 players.

Midnight Party (Ravensburger)
Nifty little dice game for up to eight players. Luck orientated, but who cares?

Monopoly (Waddingtons)
Little known game about property development. 2-6 players.

Nuclear War (Flying Buffalo)
Bad taste card game in which entire populations can be wiped out. There's even an expansion kit. 2-8 players, the more the merrier.



Railway Rivals (Rostherne Games)
Classic railway game for all the family, available in a tube. Optimum number of players is dependent on the specific map.

Scotland Yard (Ravensburger)
One of those rare cases of cream rising to the top. Sales of this unique deduction game have now passed the million mark. Quite right too, for this is more than a fair cop. 2-6 players, good with any number.

Shark (Flying Turtle)
Semi-abstract stock market game from Belgium which provides a neat combination of luck and skill. 2-6 players, best with 4-6.

Showbiz (Avalon Hill)
Ideal family game, though without the idiocy that term has come to suggest. Disappointing production, but the gameplay makes up for it. 2-6 players.

Topple (Waddingtons)
A riotous combination of dexterity and luck. The ideal game after a tipple. 2-4 players.

Win, Place, and Show (Avalon Hill)
Buy 'em, bet on 'em, ride 'em. The only thing absent from this simulation is the dung. The best horse racing game ever. 2-6 players.

Wrasslin' (Avalon Hill)
Wacky card game spoof of a sport that is a spoof in itself. Can be played in any number of ways, but whichever you choose fun is assured. 2-8 grapplers.

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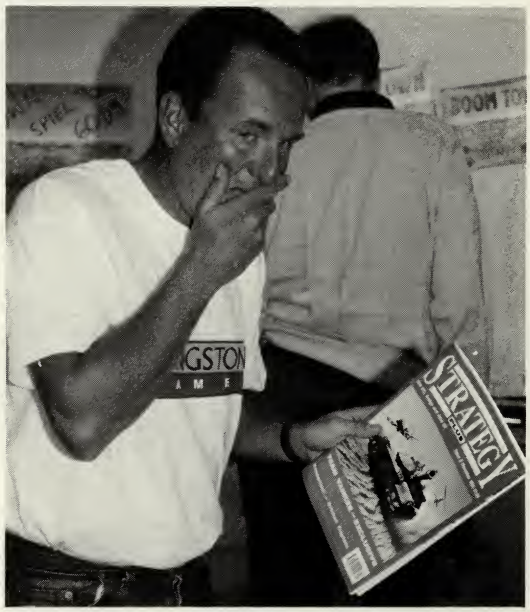
SPIEL '90

Essen, Germany, October 25-28

by Brian Walker



Ian 'Boom Town' Livingstone expresses his thoughts on a new magazine

If nothing else, the Essen Games Fair is the ideal antidote to that 'seen it all before' feeling. This was my fourth visit and yet the thrill and anticipation was as strong as ever and, as it turned out, with good reason. Essen just never lets you down. This year there was more of everything: more people, more games, more sales. The phenomenon continues.

The hit of the show was, of course, **Adel Verpflichtet**, the German 'Game of the Year' whose sales now approach the 400 000 mark according to the publishers F X Schmid. Next year **Adel** will be released in the UK by Gibson Games, but don't expect anything like the same production quality. The sales of **1835** from Hans im Glück did not approach, nor indeed are ever likely to approach 400 000. And yet, in its own modest way its achievement is just as notable. The production quality is the finest yet in the '18' series of railway games. The consensus among **1830** fanatics who tried this latest member of the clan was that it was a fine game which contained genuine innovations. Everyone seemed to agree that it was vastly superior to the disappointing **1853**. The real surprise, though, was the sales of the game which far exceeded the expectations of Hans im Glück supremo Dr Bernd Brunhoffer, so much so that a second print run is now almost certain. Prof Brunhoffer's ex partner Karl Heinz Schmiel also had a hit on his hands with **Tyranno Ex** – a jokey game of evolution, though with the depth that his previous effort **À La Carte** lacked.

Walter Müller, who produced the excellent **Favoriten**, came up with **Flusspiraten**. Like most German games this looked splendid, though the gameplay proved to be a bit of a letdown. Former *Games International* correspondent Alan R Moon designed **Airlines** for Abacus Games. Again the production quality was outstanding, and according to most gamers I spoke to, the gameplay was not far behind, most comparing it favourably to **Acquire**.

The Essen Games fair is an annual event organised by Merz Verlag of Bonn.

The first fair took place in Essen in 1982 with an attendance of 2000. It now attracts 80 000 upwards.

New kids on the block were Demand Games from Hanover. Their range consisted of four titles, the most touted of which was the horse racing game **Fieber**, which appeared to breathe new life into an overworked theme. The horse racing theme brings to mind an old veteran coming up fast on the rails. I refer to no less a personality than (very) occasional contributor Ian Livingstone whose new game **Boom Town** proved a hit with everyone who tried it. Nice to see his old buddy Steve Jackson pitching in on the stand too.

Another hit at Essen was **Excalibur** from our old friend Julian Musgrave of Wotan Games. It was voted BEST BOARDGAME 1989 by readers of three leading German hobby magazines: *Fantasywelt, Spielwelt* and *Wunderwelt* in a poll that chooses winners in a number of categories. The awards are known as the DASA awards, standing for Deutsche Abenteuer Spiel Auszeichnung and are the hobby's equivalent of the prestigious Game of the Year award for family games.

Sales forced

Most of the major German companies launched their new products at Nuremberg earlier in the year, nevertheless there were a couple of surprises: Ravensburger premiered **Astronome**, an interpersonal game (yuk!) along the lines of their appalling **Lifestyle**, and some other nonsense based on a TV tie-in. 'I never thought I'd see the day,' commented one of their employees. It seems that their marketing and sales departments now determine what will be published. Inevitably this leads to the publication of games of a less than challenging nature, a situation which has led to the following joke: Why does it take Ravensburger three years to produce a game (true)? One year to make the game, and two years to explain it to their sales team.

The other shock was the non-appearance of Mattel. Apparently all their efforts are being devoted to getting Barbie Dolls into Eastern Europe. One of the many encouraging aspects of the Fair was the number of UK gamers who made the trek, most of whom confessed to being 'gobsmacked' by the event. Gobsmacked or no, there were five UK teams among the twenty or so entrants in the annual Intergame tournament, including one from this magazine. The winners were from Berlin, and the top UK team? Yes, you've guessed it. The boys done well and the readers can be proud of them, especially as they were deprived of the services of their captain who, had he been available, would surely have led them to even greater deeds (???). SP

Most of the games mentioned in this report will be reviewed in full in the near future. Availability remains spotty because of the reluctance of UK retailers to try anything new. However, Just Games normally has a decent supply and will be happy to take orders.

SNIPER

AS IT'S Christmas, or thereabouts, the powers that be decided a resurrection was necessary. I'd prefer to say my reappearance was by popular demand, but then I would, wouldn't I? So, without further ado let's round up the usual suspects.

Federal success

My fellow gossiper Max Matrix talking about the *General* brings to mind a delightful anecdote concerning Alan R Moon, the former assistant editor of that magazine and now a freelance (board) games designer.

As is his wont, Alan sent several of his prototypes to his agent in Germany via Federal Express. The delivery person duly rapped on the door of the agent person, package in hand. However, once the parcel had changed hands and the receipt signed, the former appeared reluctant to leave.

The agent, Herr Peter Gehrman, fumbled in his pocket for some change, but still the delivery man remained unmoved. Eventually though, he spoke up: 'Is that Alan Moon from the *General?*' he enquired, pointing to the name of the package. After picking himself up off the floor Herr Gehrman invited the man in. It transpired that not only was he a keen gamer, but his name actually appeared as a playtester on some of the games in Peter's collection!

Credibility gulf

I note that Victory Games and 3W have been quick to cash in on the Gulf crisis by bringing out new 'Desert Shield' expansion kits for their games. The possibility of a confrontation with a brand new bad guy, (in fact an ex good guy) and thus provoking a whole stream of new simulations, has got the US wargaming fraternity frothing at the mouth. Doubtless they will soon be arguing over the accuracy of such 'simulations'.

What I would like to know is which will be the first wargame to accurately simulate (or even just include) the appalling incompetence of the American military. As I write, there are 42 American dead even before a shot has been fired in anger.

Couple this with the disclosures that in Panama, they killed almost as many of each other as they did the enemy, and you begin to think of *Dad's Army* as a crack unit. Simulations? Don't make me laugh.

Battlecars

Good to see Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson back on the road again – in this case the road to **Boom Town** Essen. Despite the success of the occasion the trip was not without its mishaps. Ian, forgetting the disadvantage of a right hand drive vehicle, rearranged the chassis of a passing Mercedes. Judge Dredd was immediately called and the perp was fined £7 on the spot.

Worse was to follow, though. At the supposedly 'free' Belgian/Dutch border, the lads were stopped and a plethora of forms (for the games on board) were demanded by the bureaucrats, no doubt anxious to cause as much aggro as possible before their jobs disappear (we hope) in '92. The upshot was that Ian and Steve had to leave a deposit, *and* promise not to sell any games in the middle of the night while passing through cloggie country.

State of independence

Christmas is coming and the hacks are getting fat. Yes, it's that time of year when the Fourth Estate's finest are sent out to scour the shelves for the latest thing in boardgames.

The Independent assigned self confessed chess snob William Hartston to preview the Mindgames '90 show as well as looking at some of the new releases. *The Independent* is a paper that prides itself on being 'different' from the pack. But alas, some things never change. The subsequent article was littered with factual inaccuracies and snide comments. The Germans, in conjunction with a sneering reference to **1835**, were said to be 'obsessed with timetables', while gamers innocently enjoying a bit of fun were labelled as the 'anorak' brigade. Worst of all, our great editor was quoted out of context. Needless to say, that is the not the reason for the appearance of this story.

Soft option

Whom should I espy at the European Computer Entertainment Show but our old friend Jack Jaffé, the self-styled UK's Leading Authority on Board games. Looking very determined (as usual) he was clutching a box containing what looked ominously like a game. Could it be that having failed in his attempt to have the game (whose name I can never recall) reviewed in our ancestor *Games International,* he is now looking for a software conversion so that he may start hounding us all over again?

GRiM tidings

The magazine that liked to forecast the demise of all other games magazines has itself gone to the great shredder in the sky. *Games Review* magazine was last spotted in June and has not been seen since. Amazingly, publisher Rik Rose refuses to confirm the death, and even suggests that the mag will reappear 'very shortly'. The problems, he claims, were caused by his printer 'going bust'. Seeing is believing.

Do you mind?

Fun and games at Mindgames '90. Almost 1000 people attended over the weekend and a great time was had by all. The most popular games were the word game **Articulate**,**Boom Town** and by **1835.** Encouragingly, most punters seemed willing to try anything. Some were even willing to try the food! The organisers were delighted with the response and are certain to stage a repeat next year, A full report of the event will appear in our next issue. SP

NEWS

Avalon Hill is launching its own convention, Avaloncon, from Aug 23-25, '91 at the Penn Harris Center in Pennsylvania, USA. The wargame/tournament oriented con features only AH games. $20 registration fee, $60/night room fee. Further details from the AH house journal, *General*,, or write to Don Greenwood, c/o Monarch Avalon Inc, 4517 Harford Rd, Baltimore, MD 21214. USA.

3W plans a 'special collectors' issue' of *Strategy & Tactics* devoted solely to the present circumstances in the Middle East. The $16 magazine will include a 'Political and Military Action Game' called Arabian Nightmare, designed by Austin Bay and developed by Jim Dunnigan.

Be Saddam Hussein... Invade Kuwait. Get ready for an Arabian Nightmare... Alternatively, try Avalon Hill's response to the Gulf crisis: Desert Shield. This expansion module to the Gulf Strike game includes new rules for a 'Decapitation Strike', and a chemical warfare option. Desert Shield is available either with Gulf Strike or as a separate module, though of course you will need the former to play the game.

Looming storm

I would like to agree wholeheartedly with Gary Bolton (**Storm Across Europe** review, issue #1) that this game owes a certain debt to some boardgames, but that it surpasses them in almost every respect. The only advantage that this genre of board games has over computer games is that the combat results procedure is open to scrutiny, and, therefore, detailed analysis. Some players argue that this is a point in the computer's favour, though most don't. Against this one point, the computer has a vast array of advantages: ease of set-up; ease of storage; no possibility of making mistakes in movement or in combat; no necessity to learn volumes of detailed rules; no need to buy edition five of a game just to get the latest errata or unit counters; no arguments about what a particular rule means or how it should be applied... the list goes on.

Secondly, I would like to mention the 'bug' in the game,in the German Naval Phase. The reason for this bug is that amphib losses are not applied to the German forces when they conduct their first amphib operation. When the Germans attempt a second amphibious operation, the force pool is telling them that they have enough amphib points, whereas in fact they do not, hence the crash.

There are two answers to the problem. The first is to use the German amphibs once only. The second is to not use the amphib capability for a second time until more amphib points have been built. In the second case always underuse the German amphibs by two or three points. This avoids the crash.

On the subject of amphibious power, there is a facet of the game that is not described in any of the literature and it caught me out (me being stuck in the '**Third Reich**' board game mode). It is perfectly possible to use naval transport and amphibious transport more than once in a turn. Simply plot as many moves/invasions as required and they will all be conducted, in army designation order.

Bear in mind, though, any amphib points lost in the first operation will not be available for the second and third etc. For example, 30 amphib points in Southern England could land armies in Belgium, Northern France and a couple in Holland, all in one turn.

On another subject, Theo Clarke writing in the first issue about **Loom** was absolutely right! I *did* feel cheated. The product is technically stunning; as a departure it is brilliant, as an interactive animation it is breathtaking, and for newcomers to strategy/adventure it really is the best, but as a game it stinks! It took me six hours to complete and not one single decision had to be made. £30 for a six hour cartoon is a bit much. In future will you mark all such products as 'Interactive Animation'.

Finally, have you ever heard of a game called **The Great Space Race**?

Patrick McCarthy
Litherland, Merseyside

'Anyone who regards it as a long interactive video is in for a rare treat' – Theo Clarke on ***Loom*** *in issue #1.*

The Great Space Race *was released on a machine known as the Spectrum a few years ago and fell into a black hole almost immediately.*

Debugged

Neil Wilson referred to a 'bug' in **Full Metal Planete**. In fact the bug only occurs when playing against 'Cheater Hijacker'. In other words 'Cheater Hijacker' cheats by pinching your key pieces. You can still win the game by capturing pieces off the other players in the game! So the 'bug' isn't really a bug at all. To avoid the problem, don't play against 'Cheater Hijacker'.

Larry Roberts
Neath
West Glamorgan SA11 2UL

Rabid

At last! A *serious* computer games mag, just when I thought that all the UK industry could produce was more and more software propaganda rags aimed at five-year-olds... Congratulations, and keep up the good work.

A few points. First of all, I suggest you use screen shots for illustrations as much as possible. You can tell a lot about a game from them, while cover and/or manual art can be completely misleading.

Ratings: I agree that these mean very little. perhaps your reviewers could just indicate whether complicated games are for beginner, intermediate or expert level players?

Reviews: You have a problem here which is common to all magazines, ie time pressures – obviously you want to inform readers about new games early on. On the other hand, many of these games are long and complex, and a reviewer might feel differently (pro or con) after many hours' play. Could I suggest that for the better games *only*, there might be a follow-up, in-depth review some months after the initial review? This could include some (guarded) playing hints. Similarly, please let's have more long, considered articles like Paul Rigby's in *SP2*.

Finally, I was glad to see that you were not impressed by C J Geggis's (should that be *Ghenghis? (no, actually it should have been* Geggus, *our mistake – Ed))* rabid comments on Greenpeace, even though both his gaming contacts (Sid & Doris Bonkers) will now no doubt join him in boycotting you.

Peter Cowan
Camden Town
London N1

An editor writes: So, Sid and Doris. Welcome to these pages. We trust you come in peace, though, like your 'gaming contact', this may not be of the colour green.

Magazines at war

I have just received *Strategy Plus* #2 and wanted to thank you and congratulate you on a fine effort. I was especially happy to see a section on board games. As you know, board games are an important part of the heritage of wargaming (going back at least to the invention of *Königspiel* in 1664 by Christopher Weikhmann). I still purchase a couple of board games each year (though I never seem to have the time to do much more than look at them).

In your 'Letters' section, however, I noticed some confusion about the release of **UMS II: Nations at War**. The normal problems of beta-testing a project of this magnitude have been exacerbated by the 6000 miles distance separating us, the developers, and MicroProse UK where the testing is actually done. For example, we might send a new batch of test disks by express courier to England on Monday. They will arrive (barring no delays in customs) late Wednesday night. They are tested on Thursday and then the results are FAXed to us Friday. This gives us the weekend to make changes and repeat the process the following Monday.

In order to alleviate this problem two members of the MicroProse UK staff are flying here, to darkest Iowa, tomorrow to conduct on-sight testing. They will be returning to England with the master disks ready for duplication. The manual has already gone to press and, I believe, the boxes have been manufactured as well.

Send your letters to:

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Or fax:

081-579 6485

ACE magazine did receive a beta copy of **UMS II**, a final draft copy of the manual and a demonstration of the program when I was in England earlier this year. While competition between publications is natural, please do not take them to task too severely as they published their story with the best information available at the time.

UMS II, like the most recent efforts by my friends Will Wright (**Sim Earth**) and Magnetic Scrolls (**Alice in Wonderland** – 'fess up Anita, *I* gave you the idea for that one) mark the start of a new era in computer software development. All three projects have been under development for almost three years and consumed literally thousands of man-hours of programming effort.

As you so correctly pointed out in your Upfront Editorial 'Into the future', the software buying public is demanding bigger and better programs that take advantage of new technologies. Those companies that do not evolve, and continue to churn out arcade-like shoot 'em ups are destined for the junk heap (with an assist from Nintendo, of course).

This protracted development period has certainly put a strain on the relationships between programmers, publishers, magazines and consumers. I would like to apologise for any part that we, the developers, have played in causing the delays and confusion associated with the release of **UMS II** and wish to thank the public, the media and (grudgingly) our publishers for not losing faith.

Ezra Sidran
President,
Intergalactic Development, Inc
Davenport, Iowa 52804, USA

Supreme

I have an Amiga, and enjoy a good strategy game: in particular I spend a lot of time in the air on **Flight Sim II**, so your article on **Flight Simulator** was most welcome.

I plan to buy all future issues of *Strategy Plus*, however I must plead with you to maintain your inclusion of articles on board games, and not become just another computer games magazine.

I have recently purchased the board game **Supremacy** and it is absolutely fantastic. There are lots of expansion sets already available with some great things due for release in the near future. How about an article on this fabulous board strategy game.

Richard Morgan
Gt Yarmouth
Norfolk

Watch out for an article on the software conversion of this game.

Ad percentage

At last a magazine which devotes itself to what I will call serious gameplaying: strategy and adventure games.

For a long time I have tried several different computer magazines looking for news, reviews and backround of strategy games, but alas...

Now for the criticism of your magazine. What a positive surprise not to see any percentages or silly pictures of the reviewers following the review, but instead a good and objective article which more or less leaves it up to yourself if you want to buy the game.

A very big thank you for not cramming up the magazine with advertisements just to get the magazine as thick as possible. Finally you can be sure of one thing, a subscription is on the way: this magazine is a *must*.

Steen Larsen
Roarsvej, Denmark

We would love to cram the magazine with advertisements (writes our accountant), however, we would also up the page count to compensate.

Poor relation

I must admit that when I popped into a Virgin Megastore to scan the gaming wares, I had to blink when I saw the word 'Strategy' on the front cover of a magazine. After buying it, the contents impressed me too. I think the word used in Upfront, 'cerebral', is a helpful distinction in categorising the games you should cover.

The reviewer of **Guns or Butter** was spot on when he categorised wargamers into 'dabblers' and 'experienced' players. Most reviews in the general magazines seem to think that any wargame reviewed is sophisticated and complex – buying them often leads to disappointment. **UMS** is a prime example – unwieldy and unsatisfying in the depth of simulation that it can recreate.

As a board gamer of 10 years+ experience I look for computer games that recreate the sophistication of the former but remove the arduous tasks of memory by having built-in rules and updated status charts. **Red Lightning** by SSI was a good attempt. **Fire Brigade** was historically excellent but I felt the command game system took too much decision making away from the players and reduced much of the 'front line' to chaos for too much of the game.

As an Atari ST owner I feel the poor relation of the 16-bit world. The machine is popular in the UK but has been eclipsed in the all-important US market. In the main, the best games are being produced in the US or for the US market (for example SSG and Panther). Atari ST conversions are slow, if at all, in coming and it infuriates me to see the shelves of stores with games like **Second Front** and **Storm Across Europe** available for all the other 16-bits and even the C64!

With regard to game design, I believe the gamer should have the fullest of option available when playing. I have stopped buying single player only games on principle. Despite the advertising blurb proclaiming the excellence and sophistication of the computer's strategy, such claims are usually exposed after a few plays. A system can then be devised to defeat the computer virtually every time – unlike the human opponent who is capable of a variety of stratagems. To encourage you to keep up the high standards of issue 1, I have decided to subscribe to your magazine. I trust you will keep faith with me and the other adult gamers who appreciate thoughtpower over manual dexterity. Please *no* arcade/shoot-'em-ups EVER!

Duncan Maggs
Great Barr
Birmingham B43 7PS

Will the Guardian *ever feature Page 3 Girls? Will the* Daily Telegraph *ever urge its readers to vote Militant Tendency? Will the* Sun *ever print a true story? Will* Strategy Plus *ever review arcade games?*

Over the edge

I bought a copy of the Amstrad 8256 game **Fairlight: The Edge** several years ago, and she has enthusiastically tried to solve the puzzle from time to time ever since. However, she has never managed to pass a certain screen and eventually gets discouraged.

It seems pointless publishing a game which is beyond the average teenager' abilities, without any indication of help, and I wonder if you have the answer, or further clues, available? If so, I should be very pleased to receive details.

Mrs A P Seaman
9 Burlington Court
George V Avenue, Worthing
West Sussex BN11 5RG

Sorry, don't know this one. Can any of our readers help? SP

FOR SALE: 32 *White Dwarf* mags between 52 and 98. Also *Fantasy Chronicles* 1-8 and *Imagine* 21. Best offer secures. Dave, tel 081-311 6692.

MANCHESTER Board Wargamers Annual Auction will take place at 1pm, Sat 2nd March, 1991, at St Chad's Chruch Hall (near Romiley Station), Guywood Lane, Romiley near Stockport. The event is open to anyone to buy and sell. For details, send large SAE to: 9 Tenby Ave, Manchester M20 9DU. Games can be accepted for auction on the day, but pre- registration, with lowest acceptable bids, is preferred.

APPLE II GAMES. 16 strategy, war and adventure titles, £7 to £10 + postage. SAE for list. D Willard, 17 Ingthorpe Ave, Blackpool FY2 0EL.

FOR SALE 3W's **Aces High** and **Forward To Richmond** both boxed and unused. £3 each post free. Chris Geggus, 46 Ascension Road, Romford, Essex RM5 3RT.

WANTED DESPERATELY any issues of *Games & Puzzles* or complete vols. A Holt, 29 Coventry drive, Prospect Hill, Worksop, Notts S81 0RR.

BOARDGAME KITS: Bannockburn boardgame plus details of other boardgames £1.50. ADP Systems, 37 Powis place, Aberdeen AB2 3TS.

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FOR SALE: Balance of Power (31/2"), **Pool of radiance** (51/4") plus clue book, AH **Circus Maximus** (51/4"), AH **Civil War** (51/4") all IBM. £12.50 each inc P&P. G Lodge, 12 Coltbridge Terrace, Murrayfield, Edinburgh EH12 6AE.

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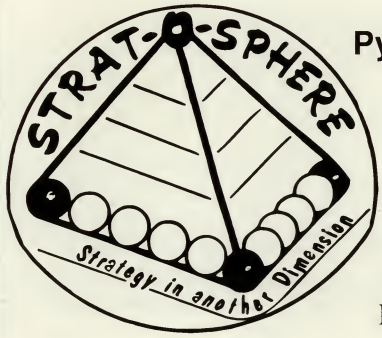
PLEASE, please can anybody supply me with, in reasonable condition, complete copies of Games Workshop's **Fury of Dracula** and West End's **Tales of the Arabian Nights**. Quote your prices to Stephen Taylor, greenways, Cooling St, Cliffe, Rochester, Kent. Also wanted – *Games International* numbers 1,2,3,5,6,7 and 10. *(see ad on this page! – Ed)*



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WANTED: *Command* magazine issues 1,2,3. For sale: SPI, AH, TSR and other games and magazines. SAE for list to R Sandell, 2 Darell Rd, Richmond, Surrey.

AMIGA GAMES for sale: **Gridiron** £10, **Lost Dutchman Mine** (1 meg) £10, **Manchester United** £10, **Batman** £7, **F/A18 Interceptor** £10, **Gold of the Americas** £10 and **Silent Service** £10. Bill Hall, tel 0702 470725.

FOR SALE: Waddingtons **Game of Nations** (1973), **Risk** (no date), **Blast Off** (1969) all £7. Gibsons **Westminster** (1983), **Tri-Tactics** (no date) both £8. Ravensburger **Deutschlandreise** (1960s) £7. Pepys **Stocks & Shares** (no date), **Penalty** (no date) both £7. Prices exclude P&P. Paul Jefferies, 46 Towncourt Lane, Petts Wood, Kent BR5 1EH. Tel (0689) 34454.

WANTED: GDW's **Avalanche, Suez '73, Beda Fomm, Operation Crusader, Red Star/White Eagle**. Also, Quarterdeck's **Malaya & Burma**. Mark Telford, tel 091-478 2379.

OPPONENTS WANTED. Looking for computer or board wargamers in the North London and Essex area. S M Switzer, 24 Empress Parade, Chingford E4 8SL.

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WANTED: Amiga version of **Title Bout** (Avalon Hill), also board games **Homas Tour** and **Ring Showdown** (no manufacturer known). Robert Morris, 41 Norville Road, Broad Green, Liverpool L14 3LU. Tel 051-228 7763. Buyer to collect or pay postage.

FOR SALE C64 computer games. **USAAF** by SSI and **Stalingrad Campaign** by Sim Can £15 each. **Crusade in Europe** and **Pirates** by Microprose, and **B24** by SSI on cassette £5 each. Bill Hall, tel 0702 470725.

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